

WALK THE TALK

Striving for inclusive organisations

Pay attention! Reading this chapter could be the most important step you will take towards making our world more inclusive. The second most important step will be to act on it.

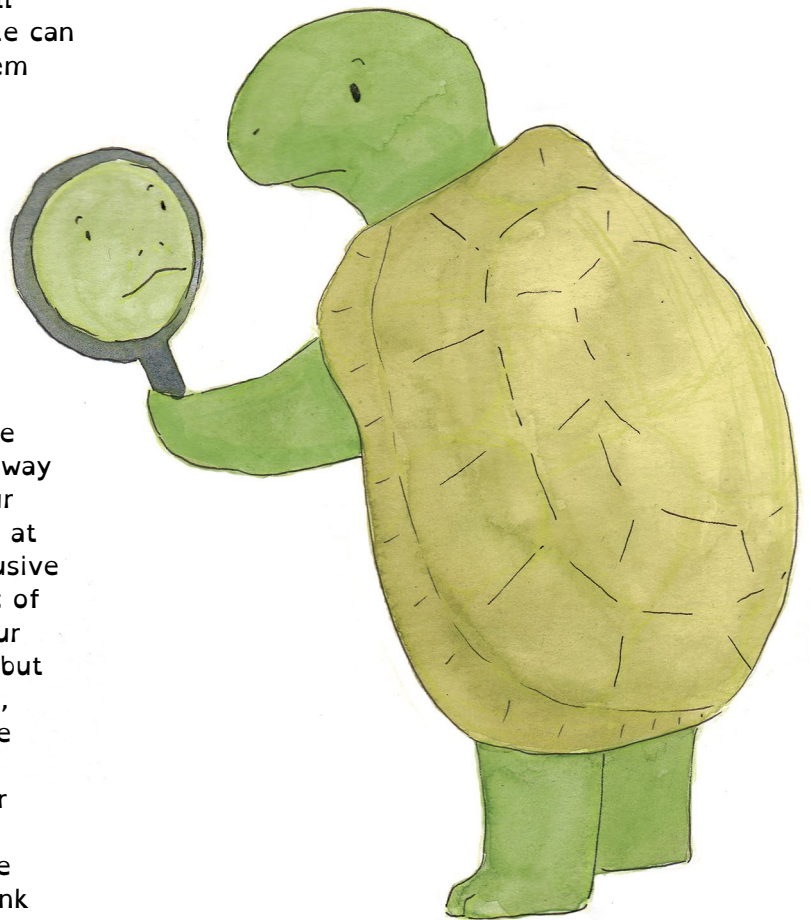
As development practitioners, we are keen to get out there and change the world. We are at our most motivated when we are working directly with marginalised groups, supporting them to make changes in their lives – or when we are lobbying policymakers to change laws so that all children can go to school or poor people can access a justice system that treats them well. We are busy people and there is much to do.

But we need to take a look at ourselves in the mirror. If we are not mindful, our organisations tend to reflect and perpetuate the practices and attitudes of discrimination that exist in the society in which we operate. It's not just about the type of people we tend to recruit – usually people like ourselves – it's there in the everyday practices and processes, the way we organise the furniture, and claim our expenses. Unless we sit down and look at ourselves and start to unpick the exclusive patterns that are woven into the fabric of our organisations, we will undermine our work in society. Doing so is hard work, but as we discover new colours and shapes, think of how beautiful our new inclusive patterns will be!

Why is it so important to change our organisations? Shouldn't we spend all our energy on working directly with the people who are excluded? Stop and think a moment: would you listen to the smoker who tells you to give up smoking? Would you give a donation to a charity that is housed in a palace and whose staff all drive round in expensive sports cars? When we

reach out to people who are marginalised, they look at us and judge us by our actions, not our words. How can we develop relationships of trust if we are reinforcing the very exclusion that we tell we are seeking to overcome?

So, what can we do? We can change ourselves.

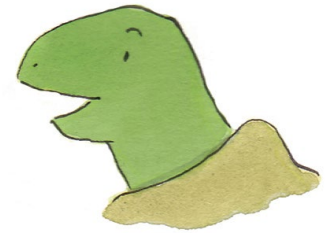


we need to take a look at ourselves in the mirror



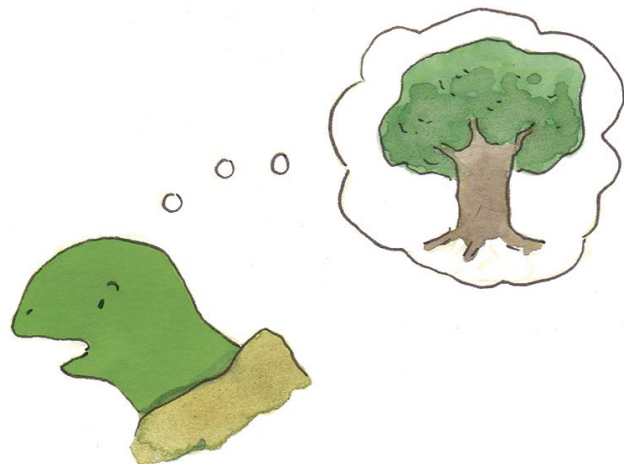
"Okay, I accept that I need to change my organisation! Tell me what to do. Give me the tools and I'll do it. Show me what an inclusive recruitment policy looks like and I'll copy it. I don't have much time."

"Well, here's the thing: there are no off-the-shelf tools. There is no single right way. There's no shortcut. It takes longer to unpick a rug than it does to make it – and you can't just unpick it and leave it at that. You need to weave something new."



"Right – Okay, then we'll appoint a team to take care of it. Someone from human resources, someone from finance, maybe a volunteer."

"In order to change an organisation you need to involve everyone who is part of the organisation. You can't delegate fundamental change to one part of it: you all need to be involved. Think of a tree – every part of it is doing the work. The leaves can only be shed at the end of the season and then re-grow at the start of the new if the roots and the trunk are doing their work and are changing and adapting to the seasons."



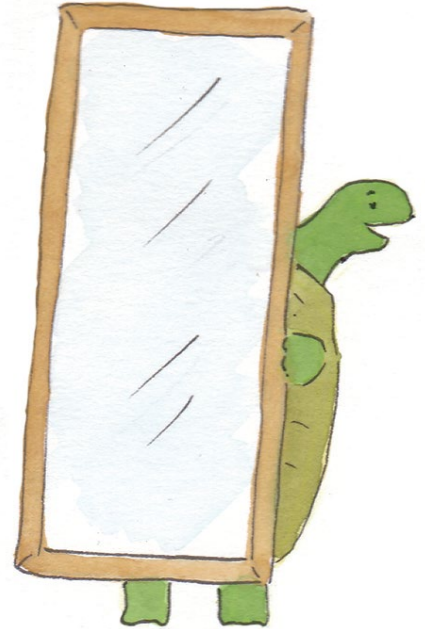


"It all sounds very difficult. Maybe it's too hard for us. Maybe later – next year – when we've finished this important project . . ."

"No, wait! There's one very simple piece of advice we can offer – and it will help you every step of the way."

"Great! Tell us, what is it?"

"Ask questions: that's all you need to do. Keep asking yourself and others hard questions and listen very carefully to the answers that are given. Then what you will need to do will become clear."



Some useful questions

- What does our society look like? Who are the people living in it?
- Who has power and who has not? How would we like it to be different?
- What does our organisation look like? Who are the people working in it?
- Does our organisation reflect the diversity of our society or only part of it?
- Does it replicate or challenge the power structures that keep some groups marginalised?



"Is that it?"

"Well, there is a tool to help get you started: it's that mirror again. You need to stand in front of it and look at yourself very carefully. How far do your staff, your volunteers, your visitors, or the people you engage with every day, reflect the makeup of the society in which you live? (You may find a census report useful here.) Who is missing? Who are you excluding? Don't analyse yet or ask why – just start making a list. Unless you have already done quite a bit of inclusion work on your own organisation (Well done! Celebrate this, but don't stop now . . .) you will probably find that the list is quite long. Go deeper: within your organisation, whose voices are the least heard? Who makes the decisions and who does not? What is missing from your organisation?"



Next, ask the most important question, the one you will keep coming back to, the one you will always be asking: why?

Why are the missing groups not represented? Why do you never see them in the office? Why are they not involved in decision-making? But don't just ask yourselves, ask others too. Go out and find the people who have been excluded and ask them to give you guidance and ideas (and later to help you implement these).

Listen to their ideas and be prepared to act. Involve them in implementing the changes they suggest. There is nothing more excluding than having your ideas for change rejected and ignored. See yourselves as others see you. Prepare to be shocked and surprised.

Of course, you may already have made good efforts in the right direction. Reflect on these and draw encouragement from what has been achieved.

Be self-critical too. Take time to think deeply about this and examine yourselves critically. Don't hurry this process. Be prepared to open long-locked cupboards and see what is there – and what is not.

You may have carefully hidden the gaps, but look behind the screens and see where the empty spaces are. Make the invisible walls that you have built to keep people out visible, so that you can begin to tear them down.

This sounds daunting, I know. Where to even begin!

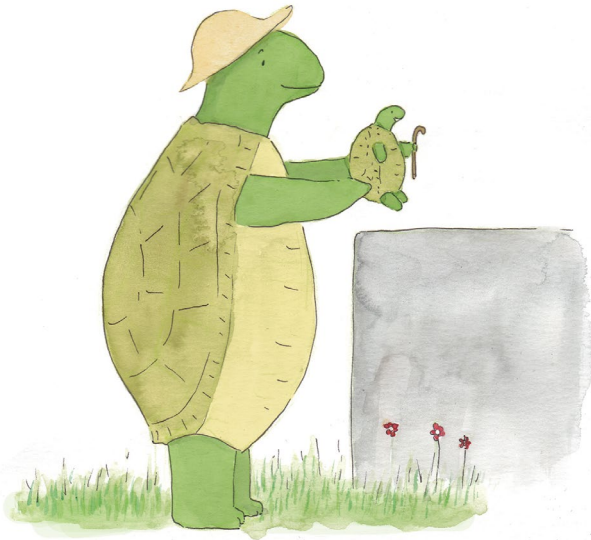
It's a bit like climbing a mountain – you start by taking it one step at a time.

Be prepared to open long-locked cupboards and see what is there – and what is not.

Man, have you seen this mountain!

Awareness – we have an issue and something needs to be done.

Inclusive development is not about pity. It's about human rights, about giving people an equal opportunity – and sometimes an extra opportunity – to enable them to overcome the extra barriers they face. And providing them with a bit of encouragement, for starters. We all need to recognise that we are currently a long way from providing equal opportunities. When stigmatisation, discrimination and exclusion has been imbedded into society for centuries, inclusion is not going to happen automatically, not even within your own organisation. Often, one needs to be challenged by the dispossessed before one can see the how big this gap truly is.



How to raise awareness

Attitude change is the first step towards commitment to inclusion. So, what can you do to raise awareness within your organisation?

- Begin by inviting people who are interested, because they can help you convince others later. A few is enough.
- Keep it simple. Ask questions to stimulate awareness and conversation. Don't give boring lectures.
- Use informal moments to talk about the issues – this makes it easier to talk freely without people feeling they need to “talk management” or be politically correct.
- Set up meetings set up to discuss inclusion pleasant for those attending – include an interactive exercise and bring a snack to share (see the example at the Save the Children Resource Centre: <https://goo.gl/2r4euQ>).
- Help people to understand exclusion through exploring their own experiences of it (see the following page).
- Engage people directly affected by exclusionary practices in raising awareness and advocating for their legitimate rights.
- Organise a workshop or training session to sensitise staff members.

“I was giving a training to a partner organisation in Ethiopia, about the importance of disability inclusion. During the coffee break one participant asked me, ‘How many people with disabilities do you have on your board?’ And I had to confess we didn't have any. Then they asked me, ‘How many of your staff members have a disability?’ And I had to confess we didn't have any. I didn't feel credible anymore.”

– Programme Manager
for a disability organisation

“When Shitaye, from the Ethiopian Centre for Disability in Development, came to us to do an intake assessment, the inaccessibility of our office became very clear. She could not enter with her wheelchair, so we had a meeting on our parking lot. This really shocked me.”

– Programme Manager,
water and sanitation programme



Understanding what exclusion feels like

Sometimes organisations seek to be more inclusive, but they act as if this can be brought about solely through developing new policies. It is a job for Human Resources, not them. All too often, the last time anyone looks at the policy is when it is signed to say that the organisation agrees with it. Inclusion only works if people live it and feel it, if all those involved truly understand it.

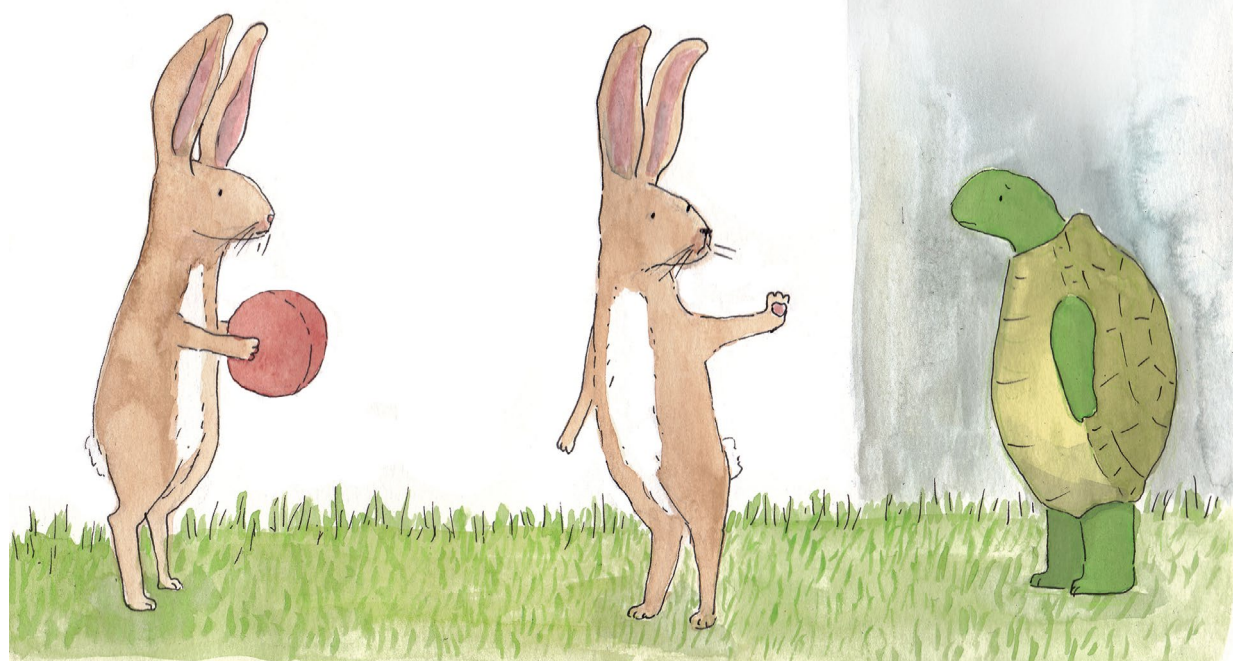
One of the things that can help develop this understanding is to experience what it is like to feel excluded. If we share, even if only for a short time, the feelings of disempowerment, distress and frustration this can deepen our understanding. There are many ways this can be done. Here, we provide examples of what others have done. Feel inspired to adjust these to your own circumstances, or to think of other experiential exercises.

Remembering a time when you have been excluded – Everyone has been

Imagine a child in their family – a son, daughter, brother, sister, nephew, niece or cousin – on their first day at school.

excluded at one time or another. Perhaps you were always the last to be chosen for a team in the school sports lesson, or you were not invited to a meeting at work that concerned something that you thought you should have been consulted on. Ask people to work in pairs and to share with each other memories of an occasion when they have been excluded or felt discriminated against. Ask them to describe it in detail – what happened? How did they feel? What did they do? Once back in the larger group, people can share their feelings and how they reacted. This can lead to a discussion of the causes of the discrimination and the feelings of the people who were doing the excluding.

Experiencing exclusion through visualising – This exercise has been used at the start of a two-day workshop for education officials in order to help them learn about inclusive education. In the first session, I asked them to close their eyes and to imagine a child in their family – a son, daughter, brother, sister, nephew, niece or cousin – on their first day at school. I then took them through the activities at the start of the school day – getting them up, making sure they had their breakfast, helping them get washed and dressed, giving them their bag and then walking them to the school gate. I asked them to imagine how they were feeling. I told them there was someone standing at the gate when they got there, a teacher. As they approached the gate, the child was eager to enter. He or she could see lots of children playing in the playground.



How did it feel when you were in a room where I was talking to you but you didn't understand what I was saying?



As you approach the gate, the teacher stops both of you: "I'm sorry," she says, "but you can't go in." The child starts to cry, you beg and you plead, but it's no use, the teacher will not let you in. How do you feel?

The education officials shouted out their emotions; some of them were visibly upset. During the break, several of them came up to me to say they had never thought about what it must feel like when your children cannot go to school. The discussion afterwards about the barriers that children face was impassioned and there was a real will to change things.

Participants can share their experiences of this exercise in the group.

Experiencing exclusion physically – Prior to a session on disability that I ran for development workers, I piled chairs and tables in front of the entrance to the door. I made sure there were no signs that a session was going to take place in the room. I stood where I could not be seen from the doorway. The first participant came, looked at the chairs and tables and went away again. The second participant did the same. Two participants came together.

They had a discussion about why the entrance was blocked. One of them started to climb over the chairs. When he was in, he saw me and asked me a question but I answered him in a language I knew he didn't know. Other participants began to enter, climbing over and under the furniture. I started the session, again speaking in a language they didn't know. Some participants looked confused, one or two shouted out that they didn't understand.

After some time of this, I asked them, "How did you feel when you got to the door, what did you do and why? How did it feel when you were in a room where I was talking to you but you didn't understand what I was saying?"

Once people have felt (or remembered) what it is like to feel excluded, they can more easily empathise with those who are routinely excluded in society. They have felt the same feelings, if only for a short time. When they discuss how to include people, they are thinking about how to stop them feeling like they felt. This changes their attitude: they now care about making the required changes.

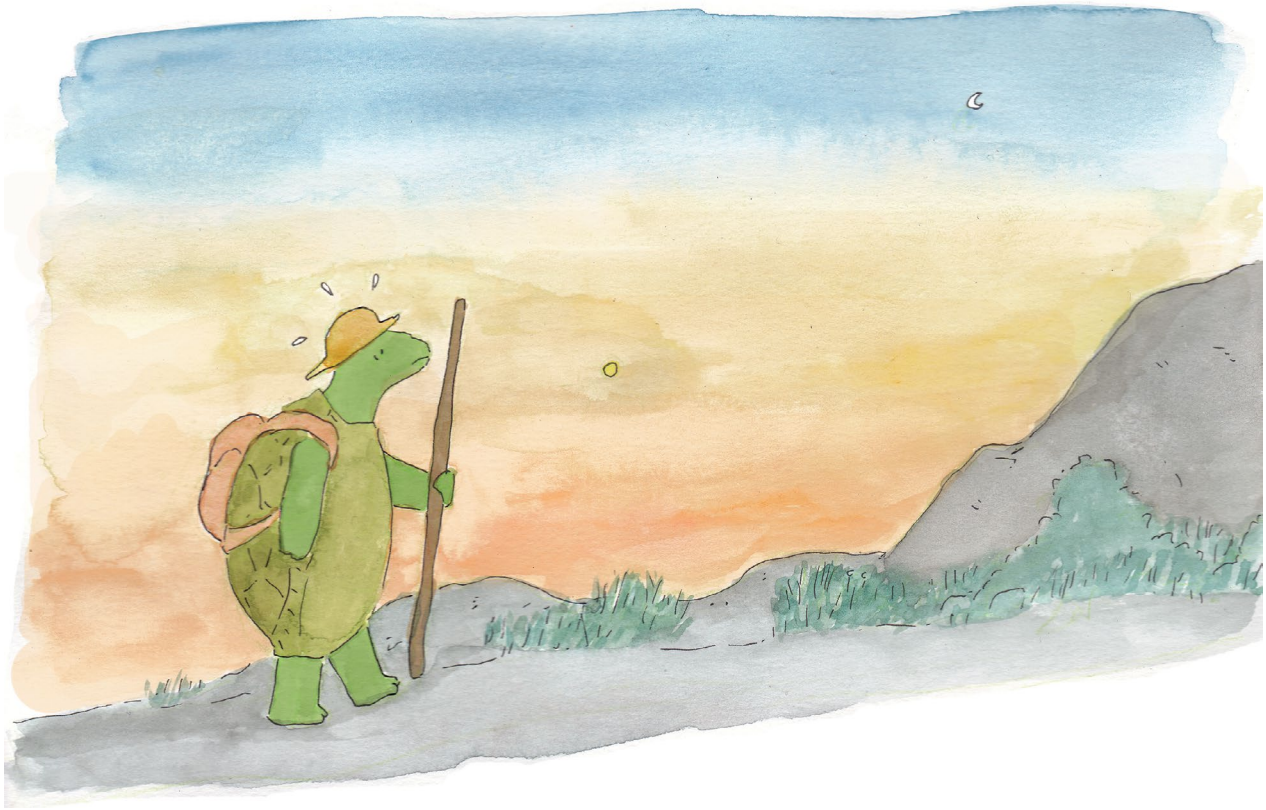
Developing an Exclusive Workshop – an activity designed to help people think about how we inadvertently exclude people



- Tell the participants that they are going to organise and design a workshop – a very special workshop. We want to make absolutely sure that NO women come. (You can use any group of people who are excluded in your society – if there are enough people, different groups can work on excluding different groups of people – or be really extreme and ask them to exclude as many people as possible!).
At first, they will be reluctant. If they find the task difficult, you can prompt them by asking questions to make them think about the structure of the workshop:
 - At what time should the workshop start and finish? Why?
 - On what day of the week?
 - How will you organise the sessions?
 - How will you arrange the chairs?

- As they get deeper into the task, you can refine the questions: what would be most effective in excluding young women? Older women? Women with young children? And so on . . .
- When they are ready, they can share their arrangements for the workshop on a flipchart labelled “Exclusive” For each point they write on the flipchart, ask them why they have chosen to do that – why would this exclude women?
- Now ask them to say what the opposite of this workshop design would be – what things would make the workshop most inclusive of women. Write these points down on another flipchart labelled “Inclusive”.
- On a third flipchart, ask them to write down what they have actually been doing in regard to including women when organising workshops. This should highlight a number of actions, whether intentional or not, that could be improved upon. Usually this reveals some shocks and surprises.
- Finally, on a fourth flipchart, ask them what they can do immediately to make their workshops more inclusive, as well as what they can commit to changing in the longer term.

You can do this activity for any event/process or system – try it yourself – it will help to make you more inclusive in your recruitment, communications, or financial systems.



This mountain needs to be climbed now

Creating the urgency required to make a start.

To change an organisation, from one that is content to do business as usual to one that actively seeks to remove barriers to inclusive participation, does not happen overnight. In fact, this process won't even start unless the entire organisation feels a sense of urgency about the need for change. This requires putting in time and effort to convince everyone in the organisation, from top to bottom, that it is important that we climb this mountain together, and that it should be done now rather than later!

"We wanted to raise awareness in our board about the importance of a rights-based approach towards disability. We asked Yetnebersh Nigussie, who has a visual impairment herself, to host the session. She showed an awareness video and did an interactive exercise. The presentation was a big success; the board members looked really touched. Later on, during the evening, the board members had to decide on our new policy on the rights-based approach and disability mainstreaming. The documents were accepted without any hesitation."

– Programme Manager

The important thing is to surface any doubts or tensions and not to ignore them. Exclusion is about power and resources. People who have more power and resources often don't want to give this up. Often, they have become so used to having power that they either don't see that they have it, or think that the present situation is "normal", so that any reduction in their power is a denial of their rights. To install accessible toilets might not seem to be controversial in itself, but if this means diverting money from someone's budget, or taking their space, then they might well feel aggrieved.

That is why it is so important to live by the organisation's values. If people see something is values-driven and they agree with it and want to live by those values, they are much more likely to give up power and resources gracefully. If changes are imposed upon them, even in the name of those values, there is likely to be resentment. Involving people and letting them decide what fits in with their values may take a little longer, but the outcome is much more likely to be accepted, even embraced.

A question to donors and NGOs

“Are you supporting and participating in the lives, processes and initiatives of the excluded, or must they participate in your procedures and projects?”

There is a tendency for external development initiatives to create their own change processes and projects and to impose these on the excluded. The danger in this is that these imposed solutions might not fit with the culture of the participating stakeholders or “beneficiaries.” This resulting discomfort from this lack of fit might well deepen their sense of exclusion and undermine their sense of ownership, thus negating the very purpose of the work.

In 2016, FrameWorks Institute carried out research on how best to communicate about and frame Human Rights issues in order to be most effective as an advocate. Some of their recommendations include:

- **Contextualise numbers:** Often, we use numbers and statistics to make our case, such as “one in seven persons have a disability,” thereby asserting that this issue deserves our attention because the affected population is so large. Facts without context, however, do not help people understand how to interpret the data. Place data within a frame, a visualisation that demonstrates what meaning the numbers have. For example: “Only 10% of children go to school. This is like having a classroom with 30 seats, but only three students.”
- **Avoid crisis language:** Crisis language emphasises the great urgency of the problem. However, framing issues in this way can lead people to conclude that the problem is too overwhelming to resolve. It is better to combine urgency with efficacy: “The problem is real, but solutions exist.”
- **Provide explanations rather than descriptions:** Often, we list and describe the issues that marginalised groups face, rather than explaining how the problems arise. Explaining how and why the problems happen, helps people understand why the given solution is going to solve the problem.

Getting commitment from the management, specifically, as well as from the organisation in general, can be a tough job. There are many excuses for not being inclusive – and these excuses need to be tackled one by one.

Some of the most common excuses we have met, and their rebuttals, include:

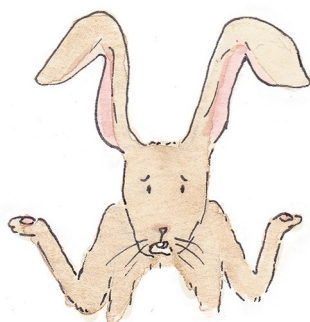


It's not in our mandate

Actually, if you are a development organisation, it most likely is. If you want to tackle poverty, you can't do that *without reaching the poorest and most marginalised groups*. Moreover, inclusion is a human right. If your goal is to tackle youth unemployment for instance, then keep in mind that youth are not a single homogenous mass: some are female, some disabled, some gay and some from indigenous groupings, or any combination of these. They might all be unemployed but face differing challenges. Again, if you're an entrepreneurial organisation, think of all the potential talent you are unnecessarily eliminating from your recruitment process.

It's not cost effective

As development organisations, we seldom have unlimited funds and don't want to commit to unnecessary expense. Organisations often fear the extra costs committing to a new programme can entail. However, being inclusive is often actually *more* cost effective than not being inclusive. Take, for example, the cost of special schools for children with disabilities. Although these provide facilities very important for some children, particularly those with severe disability, many others, who currently attend such schools could, given only slight and relatively inexpensive adaptations, attend regular schools. Research done by Morgon Banks and Polack (2014) shows that it costs society more to maintain people as unemployed, compared to the cost of including them in retraining and job-preparation programmes.



It's not efficient

This is just another way of saying that such programmes cost time and money. They do, but only once. Meeting the needs of *everyone* once and for all, rather than the needs of only some, can prove very efficient. Having to organise a taxi every time you go to work, because the trains aren't wheelchair friendly, is decidedly inefficient! Setting up a separate schooling programme because indigenous children aren't welcome in public schools, is costly as well as inefficient.

We don't have the time

This is true: none of us do, not to do everything we wish to. There is too much to do and so many issues to deal with. But if inclusion is in your mandate and mission (see the first point, since it most likely is), then any time spent on inclusion is time well spent on achieving your organisation's goals. In addition, small changes in the way you work don't need to cost much time.

So now we no longer have excuses as to why we continue to be exclusive . . . let's begin!



Start by tackling the easy slope

Go for quick results in small, bite-sized steps.

Quick wins can motivate people to keep going. Don't start with the hardest, largest part. Start with something simple, mark it up as a success, and keep going from there, inspired and encouraged by what you have achieved. Start with a small pilot project, for example, where you actively try to include marginalised groups. Use this experience to convince management and colleagues that inclusion really is viable.

“One of the first things we wanted to do was find a new office. We drew up a list of criteria for the perfect office. We knew that it would be very hard to find a building that met all the criteria. In Kathmandu, people build high to make the most of the limited space and, because of frequent power cuts, lifts are not very practical. None of the places we found were on a single floor and none of them had a lift. How were we going to make sure that people with disabilities felt welcome?”

“We asked one of our partners, an organisation of people with disabilities, to come and look at the office and give us some advice. They suggested we work to make the ground floor fully accessible for those with mobility challenges. We built a ramp to one of the entrances and widened the door of the toilet so that a wheelchair could get in. The governance team, who worked most directly with our disability partners, had their office on the ground floor. We also made sure there was one meeting room there. We invited our partners to use our meeting rooms when we weren't using them.

“It wasn't perfect, but the organisation of people with disabilities could see that we were making an effort to include them. And regularly having people with disabilities in the building made us more aware of their abilities as well as their needs. They weren't just people we were supporting 'out there,' they were part of our organisation.”

– VSO Nepal

Quick wins can motivate people to keep going.





“In the beginning, the disability issue was not a priority of VSO Nepal. Their policies were not disability friendly. The VSO Nepal office was not accessible for persons with disabilities. When we started to work with VSO Nepal on their governance programme, they sensitised themselves. They made the office accessible, at least the ground floor. VSO staff took sign language classes and had an internship for persons with disabilities. They encouraged and gave support to their partner organisations to address disability issues in their organisations and programmes.”

*– Shudarson Subedi,
disability activist and President of the Nepal Disability Network*

For more quick wins, work on embedding inclusion in the things you are going to do anyway. If you are planning to rewrite the HR policy, see if you can incorporate a statement on diversity within it. If you are planning a stakeholders meeting, pick a location that is accessible and easy to reach, rather than the usual hotel. When writing the budget for next year’s project,

put aside a small amount of money that can be used to pay for such things as a babysitter that might enable mothers to attend your activities, or a sign language translator to enable deaf people to participate. In your daily work, remain focused on where you can readily make a small difference.



Mr. Bekele, a health worker in rural Ethiopia, was carrying out consultations during an outreach for eye care services. During the consultations with male patients, he asked about their wives and families. Surprisingly, a lot of them have wives with eye conditions. Mr. Bekele insisted that they bring their wives with them during their next visit. To make sure, he scheduled appointments with them in the morning because he knew that the women have household responsibilities in the afternoon. Because of this, Ms. Fanta, who otherwise would have stayed at home, was brought into the clinic and had her cataract removed.

Sometimes you will take a wrong turn . . . and that's OK

**You will make mistakes. It won't be pretty:
but you can't compromise and leave stuff out.**

There are quick wins, there are successes – and there will be failures. You can't learn to play guitar if you are afraid of hitting the wrong note now and then.

The thing with inclusion is that there are no set of rules yet on how to do it correctly. There are tips and tricks and lessons learned and guidelines, and there is this Barefoot Guide. But there are no guarantees that if you follow certain steps, you will become inclusive of all the people you need to be inclusive of, nor that you can do so without any problems.

"I regularly give trainings, and try to ensure that all participants are able to attend and participate equally. One time, I had a list of participants quite a while beforehand, and I knew that none of them used a wheelchair, so I skimped and rented a location which did not have an accessible toilet. Two days before the training, a last-minute participant – a wheelchair user – signed up for the training. I felt so embarrassed to have to tell her that the training location was not accessible for her. After that experience, I decided to never ever compromise on accessibility!"

– Programme Coordinator

“During our last bi-annual conference, one of our colleagues was left out of the activities during quite a few of the sessions. He is blind, and the facilitator had been using very visual exercises. We’re an organisation for persons with disabilities – we should know better!”

Tackling thorny issues and horned dilemmas

The journey to achieving inclusion isn’t easy, nor is inclusion a soft and woolly thing. It is a journey full of sharp corners and wrong turns. How can we include everyone when many of their needs are so different and often conflicting? How do we reconcile the needs of widely differing groups? Whose needs should be prioritised? And what happens when being inclusive to one person has unintended consequences for others?

“We were delighted when we recruited Raj as Education Programme Manager. He was a Dalit, from a caste of musicians, who were sometimes discriminated against by other Dalits. He was also the director of one of our partner Dalit organisations. If he left them, it would leave a gap. It was hard to find Dalits who had the education and experience to run an organisation. Our partners often complained how international organisations were always poaching their staff, offering them much higher salaries. Had we been inclusive only to deprive a marginalised group of one of their leaders?

“We decided to talk to the board of the organisation. We asked them how they felt and how we could help so that the organisation did not suffer as a result of Raj leaving. Their initial response surprised us. They were delighted that a Dalit would be in a senior position in an international organisation, especially in education. He would be working closely with the government and they felt it would help to change attitudes and give them a stronger voice. However, yes, it would be difficult to replace him and whoever they appointed would need some support at first.

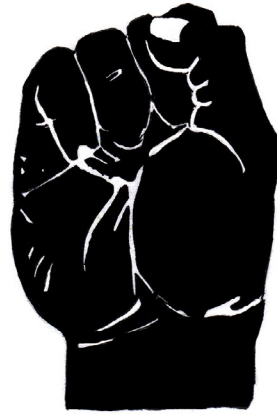
“We agreed to be flexible about when Raj would leave, allowing them to get someone else in place. We also gave him time to work with the new person until they were ready to manage alone. We had an international volunteer working for the organisation who also provided extra support. The transition was able to happen smoothly, though it was challenging for Raj to take on a new position while he still had some responsibilities with his former organisation.”

Raj’s experience: “It was not easy for me to leave my organisation as there were a lot of sentiments attached and also I was in the leadership position. With heavy heart and mind, I shared the news of my selection by VSO with the board members. It would really be difficult for the organisation to find a replacement who understand the issues and could lead the organisation. However, board members of JUP considered this news as an opportunity for the entire community of Dalits to influence an international organisation to have more focus on supporting marginalised communities, and also influencing government policies. The board members were open looking at how VSO could support a smooth transition. Even after joining VSO, I was seconded to my organisation for a week to support the organisation and also our VSO volunteer supported and mentored my replacement.”



“Our organisation, wanting to become more inclusive for persons with disabilities, developed a Diversity Personnel Policy and developed a norm for 10% of staff members with a disability. In a first attempt to reach the norm, the organisation advertised for a ‘Programme Coordinator with a Disability’. We were subsequently reprimanded by the Dutch Bureau against Discrimination, stating that this form of recruitment was discrimination of persons without a disability and, therefore, not in line with the Law on Equal Treatment. We did learn from that, and now have several staff members with a disability, hired through fair and honest recruitment processes.”

One’s intentions are important. People usually recognise when you are trying to be helpful and fair, even if you get it wrong. This is not always the case, of course: people with disabilities rightly get angry when people ask their carer questions about them instead of asking them directly. Often independence is a hard-won achievement, something that those with disabilities are rightly proud of. However, how this shapes what is required varies. I have asked people with disabilities in countries where the infrastructure is particularly disabling if they mind when people just help them up the stairs or across a road without asking if they require the help: mostly they say they don’t mind because it at least shows that people recognise their situation and are willing to do something to help. Of course, it is way better to ask the person concerned whether they want help or not, but we shouldn’t beat ourselves up too much if we get it wrong. Just say sorry, and ask how you can do better next time.

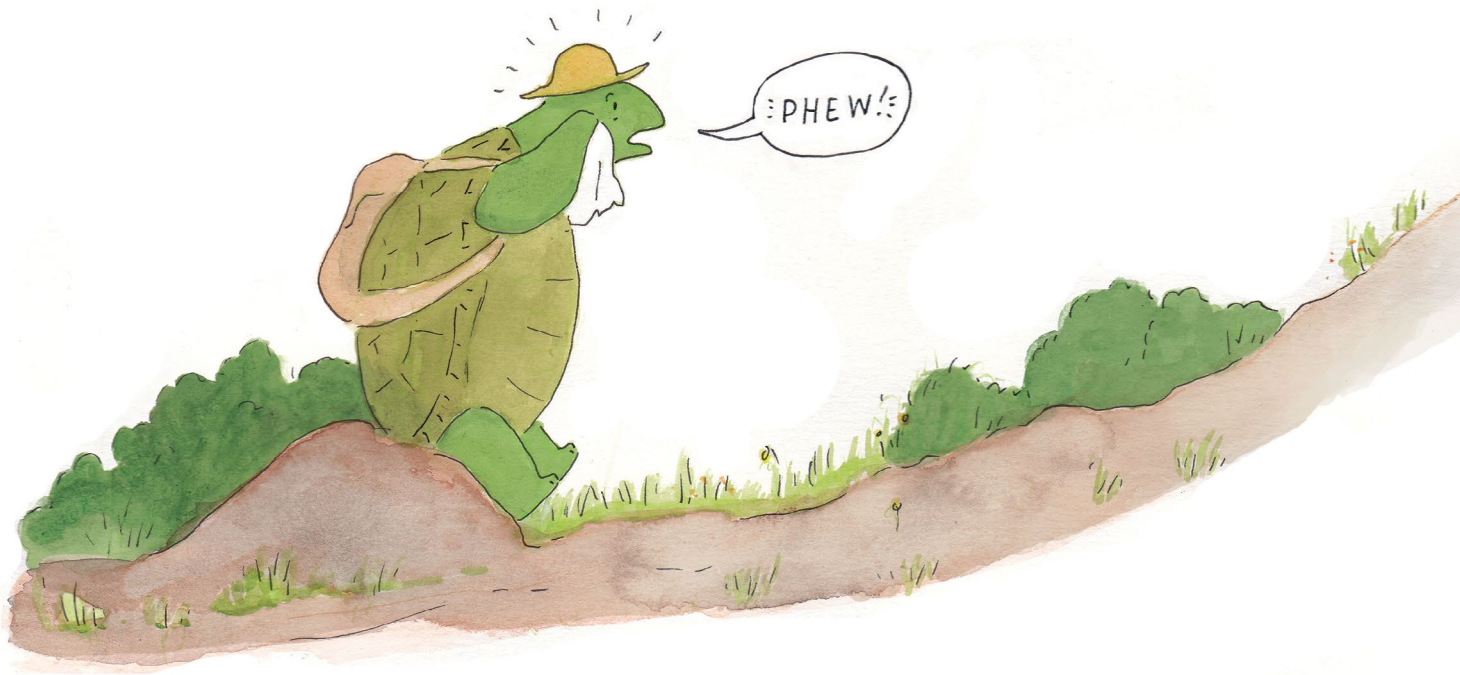


When is exclusion inclusive?

Sometimes, in order to lay foundations for inclusion, it’s ok to work exclusively with the excluded! This is often the case when the objective is to strengthen the position of excluded and to augment their power. For example, if women are organising themselves to participate equally in village governance, they will first probably need to meet separately, without the men, to first gain the strength required to prepare themselves for this. Although men are excluded from these preparations, they are not excluded from the decision-making.

In South Africa in the late 1960s, the Black Consciousness Movement, led by Steve Biko, recognised that the “non-racial” organisation of students, called the National Union of South African Students, was dominated by confident and well-resourced white students. Even though they were well-meaning, this was inappropriate. Seeing how this “inclusive” organisation was actually excluding black students, Steve Biko launched the South African Students Organisation, which only admitted black students. Through such organisations, black people were able to find and strengthen their own voice and build solidarity, before eventually liberating themselves and paving the way for a more inclusive society. The white student organisation was not excluded from a role: it found an effective place in the struggle by conscientising white people about the evils of Apartheid.

“in order to lay foundations for inclusion, it’s ok to work exclusively with the excluded!”



This is going to take a while

Change takes time: it's a process.

"Inclusion is a process which needs to be seen as a never-ending search to find better ways of responding to student diversity. It is about learning how to live with difference and learning how to learn from difference. In this way, differences come to be seen more positively as a stimulus for fostering learning among children and adults."

– UNESCO, *Policy Guide on Inclusion and Equity in Education*, 2016

Never-ending! That sounds a bit daunting, especially in this results-oriented age of plans, targets, and deadlines. How can it just go on and on? But think about it for a moment: we don't set deadlines to living our values or working towards a better society. We know that these are lifetime tasks. There will be some successes to celebrate along the way, but there will also be setbacks, times when we make mistakes. People need encouragement to learn from these, without this, the task can seem rather daunting: it is all too easy to fall back into the old ways of working.

It can take a long time for organisations to be fully willing and able to commit to inclusion and the active removal of

barriers for all marginalised groups. In the Netherlands, for example, the Law for Equal Pay for men and women was signed in 1975. In 2013 – 38 years' later – women still earn 18.5% less than men. This doesn't mean that the law has had no effect, however: the progress to equality is slower than many would want, but it is there.

Changing an organisation takes time. To sustain change over the long haul requires the task to be given sufficient priority, and this demands ongoing commitment from management and staff. The secret is to make thinking inclusively second nature, so that one is constantly thinking about how to include people more fully. We need to always be on the lookout for ways that we might be excluding people. This requires understanding what barriers exist in policies, activities, and buildings. It also requires identifying the mindset that can prevent people from participating fully.

There are a number of simple questions we can ask ourselves to help ensure we stay on the right track.

Who might we be excluding? Ask this question every time you are organising an activity. If you have identified groups of people that you know are often excluded, it might help just to go through the list and think of ways you can make sure you are enabling them to be included.

Are we involving marginalised people in planning and implementation? If we intentionally involve previously excluded peoples in planning activities, and in developing new practices and policies, then they will feel included right from the beginning. They will help us to recognise when we might unintentionally be excluding people. Involving them might lead to the processes take a little longer than usual, especially at first, and we may be challenged by what we hear but, in the end, their involvement will lead to more inclusive activities and practices. This will help us to make better decisions about inclusion.

Are we showing others how the organisation is changing? Agree on some changes that everyone wants to see and how you will know when they have happened. Set goals: these can include such things as changes in the composition of the staff, or in the people who get involved in your activities. Counting and measuring impact can be useful in understanding and communicating success, so long as this does not lead to an over-focus on targets to the exclusion of the real purpose of the change.

You can also choose more unusual and less serious ways of recognising that you are changing.

It's important that as many people in the organisation as possible are involved in agreeing what these targets should be.

You can also choose more unusual and less serious ways of recognising that you are changing. Choose something that resonates with your team or organisation – maybe an increase in the diversity of music that people are listening to, or how many different types of food people bring to the team lunch, or changes in the style of meetings, or which days are given as holidays in the office. Just asking the question, “what has changed?” time and again will increase people’s awareness that there are differences and the organisation is truly becoming more inclusive.

The journey continues

Becoming a truly inclusive organisation can be a long journey, and you may encounter setbacks and take wrong turnings along the way. We have been working on inclusion for quite a number of years now and, to be honest, we still don't know the best way to achieve it – but the journey itself is so exciting! Take it one step at a time, and choose your battles carefully so that you are not overwhelmed. Try out a new approach, learn from this, and move on to the next. Finding the right path to inclusion will take time, so don't expect to become “an inclusive organisation” overnight, but if you keep making frequent, small changes, you might come pretty darn close!

