

MISSION INCLUSION

An invitation to all

Welcome to all

The UN is talking about inclusion. The World Bank is talking about inclusion. The Sustainable Development Goals refer to equality, access for all and “leaving no-one behind.” Conferences are held and working groups formed. They all agree that inclusion is hard, that reaching the poorest and most marginalised is difficult. They talk about the importance of finding out who is excluded and why, and what we can do about it.

This is good news. But it is easy to feel overwhelmed and forget about the good work that many people have been doing over the years, even decades, to slowly address marginalisation and exclusion, to enable people to access services, speak out, and to participate fully in their families, communities and societies.

As *Barefoot Guide* writers, we wished to take a look at what people have done and what they are doing now to change things. We hope that by reading stories of change, success and failure, and by asking questions and seeking to understand, we and other practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of what it means to be inclusive in our practice and work alongside those who are excluded in bringing about change. We believe we can all start to address exclusion right now.

All the people who share their stories in this book are on a mission to end exclusion and to create truly inclusive societies. We invite you to join us in exploring how change happens and how we can make a difference. The doors are open, so please come in.

We believe we can all start to address exclusion right now.

A journey through this *Barefoot Guide*

You don't need to read this book from beginning to end. In this chapter, we provide an overview of each of the subsequent chapters. Though we believe the order in which the chapters are presented is useful, you may read them in any order. Each stands alone, so go where your energy and interest takes you.

Personal Stories

In between the chapters there are personal stories. These accounts are complete in themselves and are not linked specifically to the chapters prior or subsequent to them. The stories are offered for you to reflect on: what do they teach us about inclusion and exclusion, how do they illustrate the ideas found in other parts of the book, how do they relate to your own experience and your own challenges? Read those whose titles intrigue and excite you.

We invite you on a journey of (self)discovery. There is no right way to read the book. We all bring different things to the mission and we all have different roles to play. Find the way that is right for you.

THE CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1

Reclaiming the Power

“Understanding power and how it works to exclude, is what gives those who are excluded the power to change things.”

– JASS

Chapter 1 describes in detail how HIV-affected women in Malawi created a movement to bring about change in order to get access to effective antiretroviral treatment.

You can't understand exclusion without considering power. The story shows that everyone has power, including those who are excluded. It illustrates how one can learn from one's own experience. Surfacing this knowledge is part of the work of inclusion. The “power within” enables people to believe that their lives have value and their voice is important.

As the women talk to each other and share their experiences and aspirations, they begin to see the power of working together. They start to organise. They develop “power with.”

The “power within” and “power with” are both important, but on their own will not lead to change: people need to know how and where to direct this power. What issue do they want to address? And how? The women start to understand how the society they live in systematically excludes them, who has “power over” them, and why. Though their experiences may differ – one woman may have lost her land, another her family – but the root cause is the same: systemic discrimination and exclusion. This insight strengthens their will to act.

Armed with this understanding and shared power, excluded people have the “power to” bring about change. This is not an easy journey – there is pain as well as joy, there are defeats as well as successes. But the women in Malawi achieve their aim. Read the chapter and find out how.



Rewire the System

“How is it possible that some children exist physically – I see them right in front of me – but not for the law, not on paper?”

– SARA’S STORY

Chapter 2 reflects on how exclusion is systemic, built into society, in the structures and systems that we take for granted. By understanding the system, we can see how people are excluded and we can start to challenge that system.

Sara finds it difficult to hide her frustration as she tries to help a child who is excluded by the very systems that could help her. She begins to understand how so many children remain invisible because of complex, generational forms of exclusion. She sees the many interdependent layers that are preventing change.

In her quest to address discrimination against children with intellectual disabilities in Bangladesh, Shamsin reflects, “When society fails to accommodate a certain condition of a person, that society is the disabled one.” She motivates us to reflect critically on our own assumptions and beliefs, ones that are often unconscious and unintentional, as well as those of the society to which we belong. She argues that we need an inclusion revolution.

To challenge the system in the way that Sara did takes courage. It requires us to go against the stream and defy societal norms and ideology. Biraj also did this, on air, in India, by asking one single question and acting on it.

“I believe in the power of awkward situations, but would give my life to avoid one.”

– Biraj’s story

Read this chapter to find out how the systems in which we all live can perpetuate discrimination and exclusion, and how, even when change seems almost impossible, we can make a real difference.



Chapter 3 focuses on how strengthening accountability can increase inclusion. When marginalised people engage in relationships that strengthen accountability, they can improve their access to services. The stories in this chapter address a number of questions. How do we encourage self-reflection in the different actors involved? How do we change the assumptions that government officials and citizens have about each other? How can communities and governments engage in an answerable relationship in contexts in which the citizens do not feel safe?

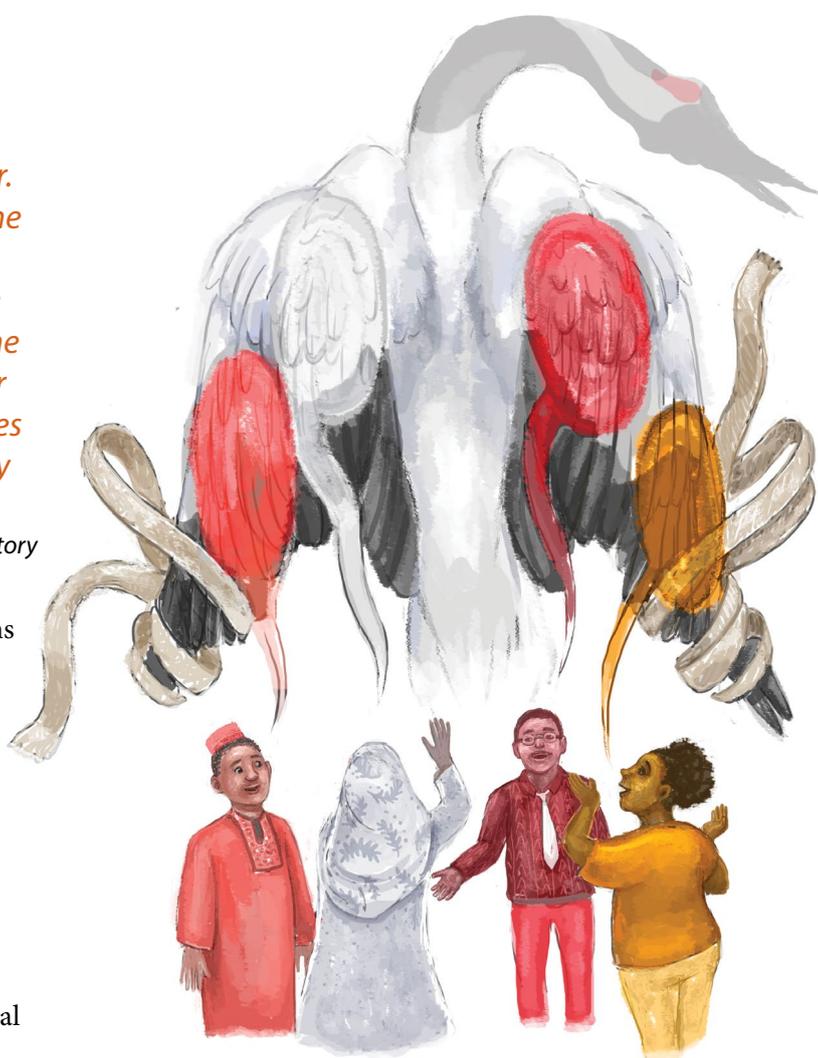
“Civil servants have told me that it is as if they are looking into a mirror, and it is not always nice what they see. They feel they can and should do much better. Community leaders have also done some soul searching: they know that they can and should do much more to make sure everyone can be served. When they come together, the service providers with their bosses, the community, NGOs, businesses and everyone else they can think of, they can and do find local solutions”

– Lucia’s story

Lucia tells how, in Ethiopia, by bringing citizens and civil servants into the same room to listen to each other, they began to address the problems poor communities face. She describes how, when trust is built and people connect to each other as human beings, they can start to make small changes that seemed impossible before.

Praveen explains how simple technology helped to overcome the remoteness and systemic inertia that was causing women and children to die through lack of access to medical care and state benefits in the state of Orissa in India. In Madagascar, Yvonne takes us through the learning process that enabled communities and government officials to talk to each other through radio shows.

In all three stories, when people see that they have a way to hold government officials and service providers to account, they realise they can change things. When government officials and service providers see that there is a way they can meet people’s needs, even with limited resources, their willingness to do so also increases. When both sides understand each other’s challenges better, inclusion begins.



Excluded by the excluded

A blind woman needs help. She goes to the local women's organisation and asks to join.

"We can't help you here," they tell her.

"But I'm a woman."

"You should go to the disabled people's organisation. They can help people like you."

The woman visits the local disabled people's organisation. There are only men there.

"You can join our women's wing," they say. "They'll help you."

She joins the women's wing and makes new friends. She discovers that, like her, they feel vulnerable to sexual abuse. She asks if the organisation can do something about it. Her friends are doubtful.

"The committee decides what issues we should focus on."

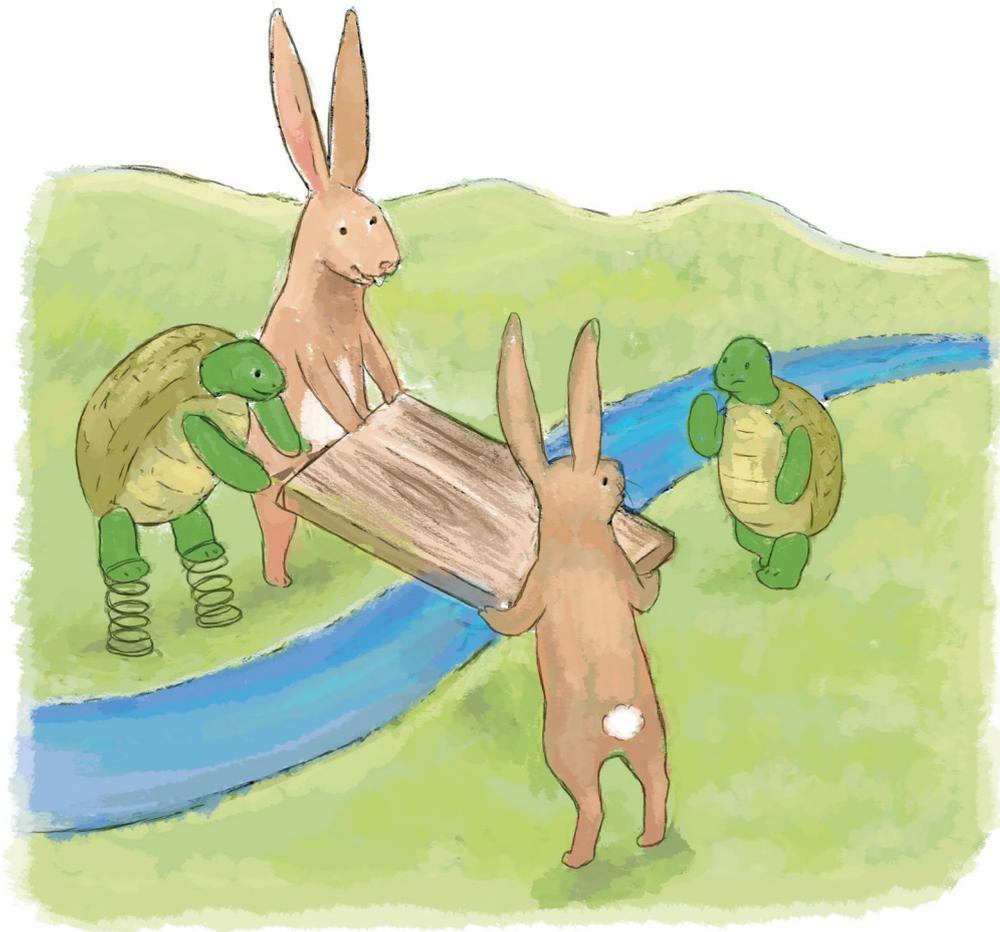
"So, we can ask the committee to consider raising awareness about sexual abuse."

"We can but they won't approve it."

"Why not?"

"Well, we only have one vote. The women's wing representative's vote. All the other representatives are men and they're not interested in tackling sexual abuse."





How is it that even organisations of excluded groups sometimes exclude those they should be welcoming? How can our experiences and struggles to be a truly inclusive organisation inspire us and guide us to work more authentically and, therefore, more effectively?

We can learn much from our own struggles to be inclusive: we are more likely to earn the trust of those we support if they can see us trying to practise what we preach (though it is better never to preach). In chapter 5, we find practical guidance for practitioners and organisations trying to be inclusive in all they do. This chapter

does not present a recipe for instant success, neither that it is an impossible mountain to climb: rather, it is a process of seeking guidance from the people who have experienced and understand exclusion, of slowly but surely improving and adding to what one does, and learning to be authentic in what one does and who one is – “being the change you want to see in the world.”

In “Walk the Talk” we engage in making our organisations more inclusive because “living” inclusive practice strengthens our ability to facilitate tough processes of inclusion.

In the final chapter, we hear from people reflecting on how they can facilitate inclusion and inclusive processes. This practice, of accompanying fundamental change in individuals, organisations, communities and societies, runs through most of the chapter. Here we tease out some of the frameworks used by inclusive practitioners to make sense of “exclusion,” and to envision a more inclusive society. This final chapter studies a diverse set of inclusive practitioners.

“Many of my students felt they belonged to a kind of ‘them,’ branded as misfits and failures. My quiet being with their painful memories made them less afraid . . . Hope does not emerge in effortless, colourful Hollywood moments – it comes from a profound and costly process of change.”

– Ed, teacher, the Netherlands

Victoria, an artist, and her collaborator, Woods, a businessman, started working together in 1993. They have enabled hundreds of people with intellectual disabilities in Latin America to find employment. New people arrived and others left,

but Victoria and Woods’ commitment as leaders, provided the energy that fueled the ongoing commitment required to sustain the work.

Victoria and Woods learnt that if everyone takes responsibility, everyone benefits.

“I grew up on a farm, and my father never tolerated anyone looking down upon him. I think this is where I developed the ability to relate to everyone as they are. This is one of the most basic capacities we need to cultivate and develop as facilitators of inclusive development processes.”

– Jürgen, agricultural development specialist, South Africa

Jürgen was concerned that only better-off farmers were benefitting from the input of extension workers. He tells how an approach known as “facilitation for change” enabled farmers to form groups based on their own needs and interests to solve their own problems. In this way, everyone was included and everyone could benefit.

These practitioners describe a range of different practices: what they have in common is that they all bring a presence to their work. Their stories illustrate what it means “to be the change”.

So . . .

Exclusion is complex. While this makes it difficult to tackle it effectively, it also means that exclusion can be approached from many angles. We can find our own ways of working towards an inclusive world. What is yours? Find a chapter or a story that captures your imagination or arouses your curiosity and begin.

