An Intersectional Analysis Of Canadian International Development NGOs Approaches To Disability

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Defining Disability

The CRPD defines disability as, "an **evolving concept**" and that "disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that **hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others**" (Leonard Chesire Disability Centre, 2017).

Introduction

Disability in Canadian Development

In a **2010** study on a representative cross-section of Canadian international development non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Wehbi, Elin and El-Lahib revealed that **people with disabilities were largely excluded** from development policy, exposing Canada's role in disability exclusion in international development. International development holds the potential to significantly **improve the lives** of persons with disabilities, yet is instead **entrenching inequalities** by excluding people with disabilities from meaningful participation and inclusion in their work (Manning & Acker-Verney, 2016).

Progress

Much progress in international disability rights have been made since the study, with the development of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (**UNCRPD**) and the inclusion of disability in the Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**) (Levesque & Langford, 2016). However, intersectional research on disability in development is lacking globally and few researchers have focused on disability in Canadian development work (Wehbi et al., 2010).

My study

Acknowledging the issues of **ableism within international development** as identified by Wehbi et al. over 10 years ago, this study seeks to conduct an updated, more **intersectional analysis** of disability inclusion in Canadian international development NGO's disability policies and how the field has changed since their study.

RESEARCH QUESTION: How do Canadian international development NGOs approach disability issues and people with disabilities within their development agendas?
a. How do their approaches address the topic of disability as an intersecting social location?
b. How have these approaches changed since the 2006 data collected by Wehbi et al. (2010)?
c. What good practices and recommendations exist that may inform more inclusive Canadian international development?

Methods

Qualitative Document Analysis

Analysis of **28** Canadian international development NGOs' most recent **annual reports** through an intersectional analysis to develop an understanding of how Canadian IDNGOs currently report their approaches disability and how this **compares** to Wehbi et al.'s findings from 2010.
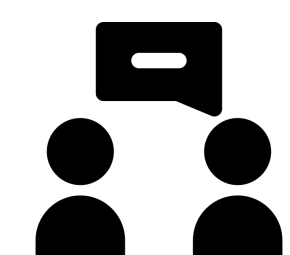
Key informant interviews

Semi-structured interviews with **4 key informants** in the field: 2 disability advocates, and 2 Disability Studies academics to **supplement** the findings of the document analysis and gain an understanding of the current **status of disability** in Canadian international development.

Grey literature review

Literature review of NGO **published reports** including **recommendations** and **good practices** of inclusive development practices for international development NGOs to identify key areas of improvement, informed by data and research.

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1 of every **7** people has a disability worldwide

(Leonard Chesire Disability Centre, 2017)

Literature Review

Issues in Development

Only in the mid-1970s did international development begin including people with disabilities within initiatives (Kett et al., 2009). Despite the prevalence of disability in the majority world, people with disabilities from the South have been largely excluded from Western development policy, research and programs (Grech, 2011).

Canadian Context

Wehbi et al. (2010) claim that Canadian international development policies tend to reflect these issues of ableism and colonialism within Canadian society. However, the invisibility of disability in Wehbi et al.'s (2010) analysis was still striking, considering people with disabilities are disproportionately impacted by poverty, an issue which was of central concern for most Canadian development organizations (Wehbi et al., 2010).

Changing Times

The UNCRPD brought disability into the development arena, resulting in growing awareness of policy-makers and development practitioners to include and address disability issues (Kett et al., 2009). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents further progress in disability issues being represented on the global stage, which have started to translate into development globally (Lockwood & Tardi, 2014).

Intersectionality

Disability intersects with the embodiment of subjectivities such as gender, race, Indigeneity, sexuality, religion, age and class (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020). Grech (2011) claims that Western development and disability studies tends to homogenize the experience of disability to that of oppression while ignoring the intersecting relationships of gender, religion, race, type of disability and class that impact the experience of disability uniquely.

Results

These results indicate the invisibility of people with disabilities within Canadian international development NGOs and practical opportunities for improvement.

Exclusion of Disability

9/28 reports mention disability

21 disability references total

- **16** references related to actual development programming
- **10** references embedded in discourses of vulnerability
- **72x** the amount of references to women and girls in reports compared to disability references
- **18** references specific to women and girls with disabilities

Preliminary results from the interviews: exclusion is a reflection of the exclusionary treatment within Canadian society.

References of Disability in NGO Annual Reports

32%

68%

- NGOs referencing disability
- NGOs not referencing disability
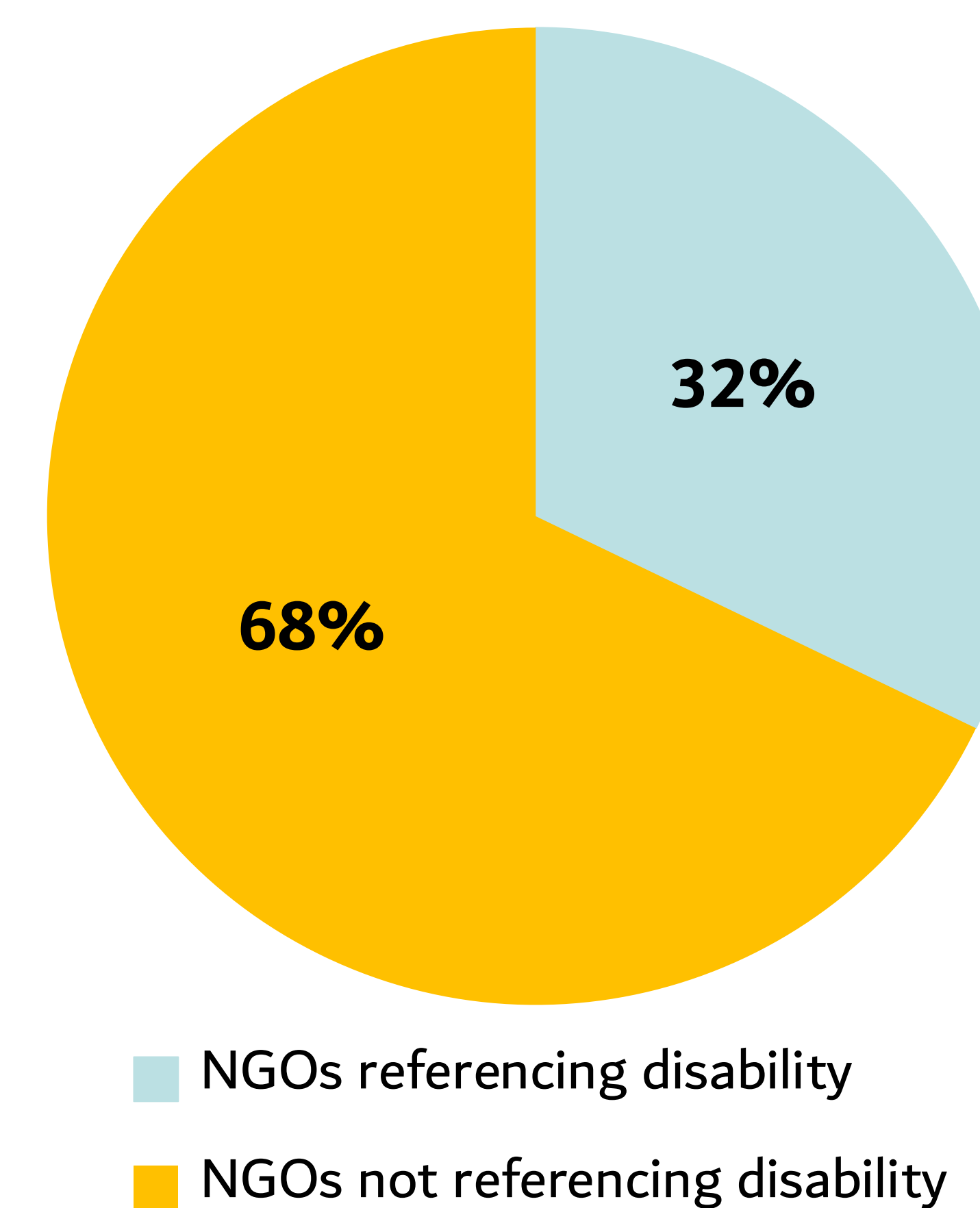
Recommendations

1. **Twin track** approaches: mainstreaming inclusion and targeted disability programming
2. Disability **disaggregated data** and evaluation
3. "Nothing about us without us" : **participation**
4. **Rights-based** approach rather than individual, medicalized approach
5. Disability inclusion **aid requirements** for government funding
6. Changing culture and **attitudes** about disability throughout NGO
7. **Inclusive education** practices in recipient areas
8. Targeted focus on **women and girls** with disabilities and the unique issues they face
9. Allocated **budgeting** for inclusive development (disability-specific)
10. Focus on people with disabilities of **intersecting social locations**

Discussion and Conclusion

The **invisibility** of people with disabilities in international development agendas is important as it both **reveals oppressive frameworks** within development organizations and also have real **consequences in their development** work in recipient areas (Wehbi et al., 2010). This is not only a human rights issue but a sustainability one, as **human rights are essential** in creating the conditions for sustainable development (OHCHR, 2020). Addressing the marginalization of people with disabilities in Canadian NGO's development work is thus critical in **advancing global sustainable development** as we cannot create an **equitable future** while leaving behind 1/7th of the population (Wolbring et al., 2013).

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