Innovate for Inclusion

Four cases of application of the social innovation lab methodology to enhance disability inclusion in mainstream settings

Light for the World 2019

Anneke Maarse, Matthijs Nederveen and Judith Baart
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Introduction

At the beginning of 2016 Light for the World launched the Disability Inclusion Lab. Light for the World works towards an inclusive society by supporting governments, organisations and businesses in making their services accessible and inclusive for persons with disabilities. However, this is a new way of thinking and not much was - and is - known about how disability mainstreaming works. Enter the Disability Inclusion Lab - a space to develop new approaches, knowledge, tools and products for disability inclusion.

One of the ways that Light for the World works to develop new tools and approaches is by setting up Social Innovation Labs. These labs bring different actors together who want to work on stubborn challenges that are blocking the participation of persons with disability. Together the actors develop and test solutions on a relatively small scale. When those solutions prove to be successful, they can be scaled up or integrated in development programmes. This way, we are able to experiment and stimulate innovation with relatively small budgets to find out what works and what doesn’t work.

This publication reflects back on four co-design processes undertaken by Light for the World’s Disability Inclusion Lab during the past few years. These different journeys in solution development have demonstrated the power of this methodology to create genuine inclusion in livelihood programming while striving to empower persons with disabilities to achieve economic success.

In this publication we describe the social innovation lab methodology as a unique approach to inclusive programming, highlighting four cases: The Livelihood Improvement Challenge in Uganda, the lab in the EmployAble programme in Ethiopia, the AgriLab in Cambodia, and the InBusiness pilot in Kenya. In the last chapters we will reflect on what we have learned along the way.

We hope that you will feel part of our journey while reading this document!

Working together to find solutions

In 2017, Light for the World received funding from the National Community Lottery Fund (NCLF) under the East African Disability Fund, to develop solutions to the most pressing issues around economic improvement of persons with disabilities in Uganda and Tanzania. This was called the Livelihood Improvement Challenge.

This collaboration between NCLF and Light for the World was considered unique by both parties. The experimental nature of the lab made it difficult to predict the specific interventions necessary and their associated outcomes. As a result, this made it difficult to estimate funding amounts and it was necessary to ask for a highly flexible funding relationship. The partnership involved a lot of exchange, critical dialogue and shared challenges and achievements.

1 Then called Big Lottery Fund.
The Social Innovation Lab methodology

We often get the question: what makes a Social Innovation Lab different from a pilot project or a participatory approach? In this chapter, we will highlight the main elements of a lab and explain what its unique features are.

**When is a Social Innovation Lab approach suited?**

It makes sense to consider a Social Innovation Lab approach if you are confronted with a challenge that closely relates to the mission of your organisation, but that you have not been able to tackle within ongoing interventions. To start up a Social Innovation Lab, you will need to be able to create room and organisational commitment to experiment and search for (unknown) solutions. This means that there should also be space for failure and redirection when needed.

**When is a lab approach less suitable?**

It makes less sense to set up a lab when the above conditions are not met. In other words, a lab might not be effective and sustainable when the challenge arising is not related to the mission of your organisation. In such a case, you will never get the internal commitment to invest in the lab, as you are not searching for answers to questions that the organisation is struggling with.

Of course, if the challenge that comes up is not a challenge that is a priority to the potential user group, it will not make sense to invest in a solution. Also, for some challenges you might already have solutions at hand that can be implemented without other actors involved. We also need to realise that it will be very hard to start a lab approach within a project that has tight planning which has clearly defined outcomes with deliverable results.

**Challenge**

A lab is set up around a challenge. It starts with a situation where big problems are seen but there are no solutions yet. This differs from a pilot project, which is usually intended to test an approach or solution which has already been thought of.

**Stakeholders**

A lab focuses on problems that cannot be tackled by one actor alone. Collaborating with other stakeholders - be it non-profit, government or for-profit organisations - stimulates us to think out of the box and find solutions that would not have come to our minds if we had been on our own.

There is usually one organisation or a small group of organisations that initiate a lab. They have a challenge and acknowledge that they cannot tackle it on their own, and thus invite other stakeholders and experts to join them. Solving the challenge is a co-creation process, whereby the individuals who stand to directly benefit from the potential solution (the ‘users’) are one of the most important stakeholders involved. This so called ‘human centred design’ requires carrying out proper research, involving potential users in design meetings, and listening to their stories. Because our labs specifically focus on the inclusion of persons with disabilities, groups of persons with disabilities are always at the core of the co-creation process of the labs we initiate.

**Problem analysis and strategic direction**

Together with the members of the lab, we carried out an in-depth analysis of the problems in order to understand the root causes of the challenge statement. This analysis prompts a dialogue about the root causes so that a variety of options can be considered when finding a solution to the challenge. Based on this analysis, a strategic direction can be chosen that may be different than initially thought. For example, in InBusiness we started with a challenge that focused on access to microfinance for persons with disabilities. In close consultation with micro entrepreneurs with a disability, we soon found out that access to finance was not the core problem. So we shifted the strategic direction towards access to business services and business linkages. In a pilot project these kinds of decisions would only be made after an evaluation, usually done at the end of a project.
Ideation

In this phase the parties involved start thinking about possible solutions: ideas are generated. The ideas that are found to be the most promising are taken to the next step.

Prototyping

A selection of ideas is tested on a small scale and in quick loops, during which potential solutions are developed and tested. Solutions can be new services, new ways of cooperation or new products. We start with a “just good enough”-version (a prototype). This early version is presented to potential users or clients in an early stage to get their feedback. The prototype is then adjusted and improved based on the feedback - reducing the risk of investing in a solution that doesn’t work.

Upscaling

The solutions that have proven successful after several rounds of development and testing are taken to the scale-up phase. This means that the solution is offered to a bigger audience, or integrated into a larger (development) programme.

A lab is a space where experimentation takes place. Failure is not only accepted, it is seen as a way to learn and to grow. Successes and failures alike will provide information about the assumptions made at the beginning of a lab. This information provides insight in what works and what doesn’t work, and helps to move towards a viable solution.

In contrast to a project, a lab doesn’t have a fixed end date. As long as new knowledge and solutions for (sub-)problems are created and as long as the participants see an added value in working together, the lab can keep running.
Case 1.
The Livelihood Improvement Challenge was initiated in Uganda and aimed at developing scalable practices for inclusive livelihood development for persons with disabilities. The Challenge aimed to better understand the barriers that limit the participation of youth with disabilities in waged employment and livelihood programmes, and to learn how others have addressed those barriers – and then together with the people at the heart co-create and design solutions, as well as test those solutions, and document and share insights.

We started out by learning directly from persons with disabilities as we immersed ourselves in their lives to deeply understand their needs and solutions. We also learned from strategic partners by visiting their programmes and trying to understand their methodologies and practises. We tested several approaches to learning, ranging from traditional approaches like Focus Group Discussions, interviews and a desk study to more innovative ways of gathering views and perspectives, like radio polls and organizing a Learning Expedition.

Innovative ways of gathering knowledge

Radio polls:
We organized radio polls, talk shows and a call centre survey in collaboration with a technical partner and local radio stations in Northern Uganda. This made it possible for us to reach out to persons with disabilities and other community members in the local language, beyond persons that would be usually targeted when organizing consultation workshops or focus group discussions. We focused on two poll questions:
1) What is the main barrier youth with disabilities face in accessing vocational training programmes?
2) What are barriers in accessing employment for youth with disabilities?
Persons with disabilities that had responded to the survey were followed up with a phone call to ask for more background to their answers. We reached out to a total of 1029 respondents, among whom 270 were respondents with a disability. This included 42 persons with hearing impairment, who were given the option of receiving the poll questions by text message.

Learning Expedition:
During the Learning Expedition, which lasted five days, we visited five good practices around economic empowerment of youth implemented by disability specific as well as mainstream livelihood programmes. Young persons with disabilities were in the lead of the Expedition, each of them responsible to guide the discussion per day. We learned that disability specific livelihood programmes can benefit from market oriented approaches, with a focus on private sector involvement. We felt that the ‘disability sector’ has missed out on some of the developments in the field of livelihood development; for example, in relation to value chain development.

We saw good practices that involve persons with disabilities as resource persons to support vocational training institutes to accommodate students with different types of impairments. They act as role models as well as coaches, and can do this effectively because they speak from their own experiences.

We have gathered that the Learning Expedition added value to our understanding of how to address core challenges and it has inspired us to come up with innovative solutions.

We came up with three key insights:

- There is a range of ongoing livelihood programmes in Uganda that are highly innovative and adaptive in their efforts to reach out to young persons and link them to markets. Most of these programmes target vulnerable youth but leave out young persons with disabilities. These programmes are not excluding these people deliberately, but out of the assumption that this group of vulnerable youth would or should be covered by disability specific organisations and government, as well as a lack of confidence in their own ability as an organisation to include them.
Person with disabilities and their families in rural areas lack access to information about opportunities and support structures available to them, as well as access to information that would help them to plan their lives.

There is a high level of self-exclusion and dependency. Even if persons with disabilities are aware of opportunities, in many cases they might not proactively go for an opportunity because they assume that it is not for them, or they may have had too many negative experiences already. Also the fact that they have grown up in an environment that does not acknowledge their abilities but only looks at their disabilities has strongly affected their level of self esteem.

With these key insights in our minds, we entered the next phase. In this phase we aimed at making sense of what we had learned to identify opportunities for possible solutions. We brought together the young persons with disabilities that were involved in the Learning Expedition with creative designers and a process facilitator, and had a pressure cooker session that lasted 4 days. As a result of this session we came up with three possible solutions.

Figure 1: The three ideas that came out of the design sprint

1. **Identify YWD**
   - **Directly target Youth With Disabilities**
     - to empower them through building self-esteem and entrepreneurship capacities

2. **Communicate with YWD**
   - **Music Mobilization Tool**
     - inclusion song and dance with crowd sourced local adaptations, event tour through the villages, leaving a repeat kit behind.
   - **Mobile App for Enablers**
     - educative android app with: training materials, stories, how-to-tips and opportunities and referrals to help enablers to communicate with YWD, families and communities and businesses and organisations.

3. **Empower YWD and families**
   - **Target Family and communities**
     - to sensitize and change their mindsets on the abilities of YWD

4. **Educate YWD: mainstream and programmes**
   - **Target Organisations and private sector**
     - to sensitize, change their mindsets and open up their programmes and companies to YWD.

5. **Improve livelihoods: entrepreneurship and employment**
   - **Make 12.4% Work campaign**
     - a multi-media campaign around an inclusive business / orgs directory. 12 inclusive companies inspiring others to join the movement and reach a 12.4% inclusive workforce.

6. **INCLUSION**
Two out of the three ideas were further developed into prototypes: The Make 12.4% Work Initiative and the Mobile App for Enablers. It was thought that the third idea could be developed at a later phase.

**Make 12.4% Work!**

And so the Make 12.4% Work Initiative was born. The 12.4% refers to the percentage of the population in Uganda that has a disability. The initiative’s objective was to create momentum around disability inclusion in economic development. By bringing together 124 proactive companies and development organisations, it was proposed to improve the livelihood of 1500 young persons with disabilities in two years time. What came out of the design sprint was a rough idea, a brand and a logo.
The outline of the idea was to solve our challenge - a lack of livelihood opportunities for disabled young persons - by creating demand among employers and development organisations to become more disability inclusive. We would establish a ‘pull factor’ by working through ambassadors - respected companies and organisations already showing good practices on disability inclusion. We decided to establish a group of Disability Inclusion Facilitators, who would promote the abilities of persons with disabilities towards the companies, and show them the ‘how’ of disability inclusion.

Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs) are young people with disabilities who raise awareness on inclusion, support businesses in becoming more inclusive, and match disabled job seekers with livelihood opportunities. They are a local resource able to provide effective and locally relevant support to young people with disabilities, employers and other livelihood actors on the ‘how’ of disability inclusion. We started with a team of six Disability Inclusion Facilitators.

**Our Team**

These wonderful people make it all possible

Peter Ochieng
Disability Inclusion Facilitator

Musa Mwambu
Disability Inclusion Facilitator

Eric Wakoko
Disability Inclusion Facilitator

Dorcus Kabahenda
Disability Inclusion Facilitator

Christine Kirungi
Disability Inclusion Facilitator

Musa Mwambu
Disability Inclusion Facilitator

Dorcus Kabahenda
Disability Inclusion Facilitator

Robert Ssewagudde
Disability Inclusion Facilitator
We entered an interesting and dynamic period of learning together. We went through short action learning cycles of continuous adaptation and improving the solution. The key factor of success was the fact that the young persons with disabilities who designed the solution during the design sprint were actually the ones in the lead of bringing it to life, and are the core implementers of the Make 12.4% Work Initiative as the Disability Inclusion Facilitators. So our most important first step was to further build the capacity of this group in disability inclusion as well as in training and facilitation.

We needed to have two elements in place before launching the initiative. First, we asked 12 organisations to become ambassadors for the Make 12.4% Work Campaign. The ambassadors would be the first twelve members, and would be instrumental in enticing other employers and development organisations to join as well. The chosen ambassadors were selected for being respected companies and organisations, as well as already having some experience in hiring persons with disabilities. They represented a range of sectors, including the financial, beverage, utilities, retail, hospitality and public sector, as well as national and international NGOs.

Second, we needed a strong branding of the initiative that would include a logo, brochures, campaign materials and a website to profile our ambassadors as well as our Disability Inclusion Facilitators.

We launched the campaign, and it worked! A range of organisations and businesses were becoming members of the Make 12.4% Work Initiative, committing to become inclusive. Companies were sharing vacancies with us to share within our network of job seekers with a disability - the ‘demand’ had definitely been created. However, this hardly resulted in the employment of persons with disabilities.

We realised that this was due to a lack of work experience among graduates with a disability, as well as the lack of networking, presentation and interview skills. Also, most of the employers who had showed their commitment to hire persons with disabilities lacked actual exposure to the abilities of persons with different disabilities. In addition, up til now we had limited the sharing of vacancies to our Facebook page.

So we started a WhatsApp group for job seekers with a disability and ensured that the opportunities were available in different formats (sign language, voice, etc.). We also decided to develop and test an internship programme as a part of the Make 12.4% Work Initiative. The opportunity to recruit an intern with a disability was shared among the Make 12.4% Work members and was received enthusiastically. The Disability Inclusion Facilitators were groomed in their additional role of job coach and advisor on workplace adaptations. The major added value of the internship programme was that we could offer opportunities to job seekers with a disability to...
gain work experience and possible retention, and prepare them for the opportunity with training on interview skills, professional skills and other soft skills. At the same time it is an opportunity for the employers to be exposed to the abilities of persons with disabilities and to build their confidence in becoming an inclusive employer. The time between the idea and actual placement of the first intern was 3 months.

The WhatsApp group pictured left was created by Make 12.4% Work and has a growing group of participants (64 at the time of writing). We share opportunities and other information that might be relevant for job seekers with a disability. We have started to share opportunities in sign language and voice to ensure that persons who are deaf or have a visual impairment can also access the content.

We also realised that, to work with companies and organisations, we would need to ensure the availability of the Disability Inclusion Facilitators. With only 6 DIFs so far, this would not be sufficient, effective or efficient in the long run. This is how the Disability Inclusion Academy came up, and the idea to train a diverse group of local DIFs starting in Northern Uganda. Whereas the training of the first group of 6 DIFs was rather informal and emerging, for the Disability Inclusion Academy we came up with a Competency Framework for the DIFs, outlining the roles and related competencies that need to be in place to fulfill that position (Knowledge, Skill, Behavior). This helped us come up with a curriculum that was tested in Northern Uganda and, after slight modifications, is now being used in other countries as well.
A third refinement was the set up of structures to enhance an enabling policy environment. We realised that, to ensure sustainability of the initiative, major changes needed to take place in the policy environment. We set up two task forces: one on Inclusive Employment and one on Inclusive Livelihood Programming, both being governed by a national Steering Committee including representatives of all relevant bodies relating to employment and livelihood development. The task forces are responsible for coming up with proposals that address some of the issues encountered during programme implementation that relate to the policy environment and/or government programmes. For example, the task force on Inclusive Employment proposed amendments to the Employment Act when it was being reviewed, and the task force on Inclusive Livelihood came up with a proposal to enhance access for persons with disabilities to the government Youth Livelihood Programme.

Since the launch of the Make 12.4% Work Initiative in March 2018, membership has grown from 12 to 28 members in January 2019. As of now, membership of Make 12.4% Work is free. To become a member, the organisation signs a proof of commitment that it shall open its doors to persons with disabilities. Already 12 companies and organisations are hosting interns with a disability and all members share their vacancies within the Make 12.4% Work network.

We have been able to create a buzz around Make 12.4% Work and inclusive employment through a well-designed communication strategy that uses a diverse range of media channels. A strong ‘pull’ factor has been generated on employers and other mainstream livelihood actors to join the initiative and take action for inclusion. Make 12.4% Work has a Facebook page with 9,382 followers and a Twitter account with 90 followers at the time of writing.
The second idea that we had thought of in the prototyping phase was the Make 12.4% Work mobile app. When we thought of the app we identified that:

“There is a lot of information available but it often doesn’t trickle down to the people that need it. The aim is to bring most relevant information together and make it freely available in an attractive and inclusive way. Since youth with disabilities have little access to any media, there is always a middle person involved. That is why we focus on the middle person and are confidently using technologies to make sure people have access to contextualized and updated information through the enablers.” (quote from design sprint report)

We decided to focus first on creating access to information for our Disability Inclusion Facilitators to use in their interactions with companies and organisations. We wanted the DIFs to have access to resource documents, tips and examples that would guide them in their work. These resources would also include stories and clips of successful role models with disabilities working in different settings and examples of practices of other Make 12.4% Work members. We also identified that the DIFs could share relevant information in the app with employers, development organisations and youth with disabilities. For example, a clip of a deaf young woman working successfully as a bank teller could be shown to deaf persons to encourage them to apply for jobs as well as to branch managers at banks to help them realise that somebody who is deaf may be able to perform well at their branch.

The design of the app was done together with the DIFs because they would become the main users. This included getting them acquainted to using an android phone; especially two DIFs with a visual impairment that had never used a smartphone.

A first prototype was tested and redesigned based on a reflection session. The second prototype that came out of that session was used for about six months. We are now in the phase of developing a third prototype; the visualisation on the left is a mock up of what the dashboard will look like.

The app was evaluated with the users (the DIFs) in three major areas:

- Functionality and usability
- Quality of the content
- Accessibility (especially for users with visual impairment and cerebral palsy)
We realised that different user groups had different needs, and selected the DIFs as the main user group. However, whilst tuning the app to the needs of the DIFs, we felt the need to also come up with a version that members of Make 12.4% Work could use. We already offer them information through the Make 12.4% Work website, which has a knowledge hub and a news section where opportunities are shared, but we learned that most members could benefit from the referral tab of the app, and this is how we came up with the ReferAll app.

The ReferAll app maps out Disabled People’s Organisations and their branches all over Uganda, as well as service providers like rehabilitation centers and sign language interpreters, and disability specific organisations. The first responses were that this app is very useful because a first step for mainstream organisations to start including persons with disabilities in their programmes is to link up with local disability structures. Organisations may need to address special needs of persons with disabilities, like the need for an assistive device. This requires referral to a specialist organisation that can fulfill such needs. Similarly, organisations might need to engage with sign language interpreters or may need to obtain services to brail materials and may not be familiar with such services in the areas where they work.

So what is next? The Make 12.4% Work Initiative is tailored and branded to the context of Uganda. However, when we were designing and developing Make 12.4% Work we felt that it needed to be scalable. That is why the overall brand is We Can Work, as demonstrated through the website www.wecanwork.ug. Still, we strongly believe that the model ‘We Can Work’ cannot be just copied to another country. This model will work best in other countries when a similar co-creation process that engages persons with disabilities from the start of the design process occurs. This is the only way to ensure that users feel like they are in the centre of the solution and will take ownership of the programme.
Case 2.
EmployAble Ethiopia: A prototype in a prototype

In Kenya, Ethiopia and Rwanda, Light for the World initiated and currently manages EmployAble, a programme focused on improving access for youth with disabilities to vocational training and the labour market. In 2017, the first three-year phase of the programme was completed, and the impact was good. 448 youth with disabilities had been included in vocational training programmes, and within a year after their training, 71% of them had been able to find some form of employment. Their financial saving ability had risen and their participation in their communities had increased substantially. But there was a weakness in the programme that we could not neglect.

We are an organisation that not only promotes inclusion, but inclusion is in the vessels of our organisation. Yet in the first three years of EmployAble, there were certain groups that were left behind. One of these groups was the blind youth; of the 448 youth attending training, 14% were youth with a visual disability, and only a few of those were blind. We had to find out why they were not participating and come up with solutions to this challenge.

We decided to set up a Social Innovation Lab in Ethiopia to tackle the challenge: How to include blind youth in Technical and Vocational Education and Training?

Our first step was to invite partners to our lab. We asked the Ethiopian Center for Disability in Development to take charge in the organisation of the lab. We invited two vocational training centers based in Addis Ababa: the University of Addis Ababa, an IT training center for visually impaired persons, and the Ethiopian National Association of the Blind. These organisations formed the core group of this lab.

How were the partners selected?

A challenge, by definition, is so big that it requires the input of a whole variety of stakeholders to solve it. This makes stakeholder involvement an important step, and it is worth thinking through carefully who you invite to the challenge.

In this case, for example, we invited:

- The National Association of the Blind to ensure that blind persons were involved in the creation of the solutions that they would potentially use. The association represents blind persons in Ethiopia and is therefore a key stakeholder.
- Technical and Vocational Education Centers, as we realised that we had to develop solutions together with teachers.
- The University of Addis Ababa. They have a special education department which brings in new knowledge.
- Ethiopian Center for Disability and Development as the lead organisation of the EmployAble programme in Ethiopia.

As a core group, we decided to organise a design sprint. We decided to sit together for five days to analyse the problem and start developing and testing a solution for the challenge we were facing.

We started by collecting stories of blind youth that had participated in vocational training through the EmployAble programme. The stories helped us understand their needs and the barriers that they are facing. We also visited a vocational training center and had an interview with the teachers.

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2 We have used the basis of the design sprint methodology, where you consecutively do a problem analysis, user needs assessment, ideation, prototyping and testing of the prototype in five days.
From the stories of blind youth (from the EmployAble programme):

“At the beginning of my studies I wished to do knitting, but they do not allow students with visual impairments to follow that because it seemed very complicated for teachers to assist them.”

“With the knowledge I acquired in goat fattening, I joined my friends in working in cooperatives.”

Most of the roads are bumpy and uncomfortable which makes it difficult for us to walk and easily access materials or to keep the goats. Most of the time we need to walk to find grass or water and due to the road we couldn’t easily access the water or the grass.”

“The teachers have no experience on how to handle us. They have an attitude of saying we are very slow, we are not picking up. Sometimes the lessons they are giving are too long for us to grasp. It is hard, because for us we have to listen and put everything in our memory so that we can implement it.”

On the second day of the design sprint different experts were invited to help analyse the problems and identify the patterns of exclusion. The insights from this session were:

- Blind students usually do not choose trainings based upon passion, but are more or less pushed into trainings that are deemed fit for blind people.
- There are anecdotal examples of trainers who have successfully trained blind students, using their own creativity and perseverance to overcome practical hurdles.
- School management and teachers of regular vocational training institutes don’t know how to make reasonable accommodations to teach blind youth.
- Vocational training institutes are not physically accessible for blind students.

On the third day we had an extensive brainstorm, developed potential solutions and selected the most promising one.

The selected solution was a mentoring programme for vocational teachers. The idea of the programme was to facilitate teachers to come up with their own solutions to integrate blind persons in their trainings. We would stimulate this by providing best practices and available tools, coaching them to develop new solutions in their classrooms. We titled it: Innovate for Inclusion.

This was a new approach: before we started our sprint we had searched for examples of adaptations for blind youth in vocational training centers in Europe and Africa. For the primary education setting, different devices are used, like tactile maps for geography and advanced braille solutions for mathematics. We hardly found any specific examples for vocational training, so we knew we had to develop something new and we wanted to do this together with the teachers, making use of their creativity. They know better than anyone else what works and what doesn’t work in their classrooms.

On the fourth day we developed a prototype. The prototype was basically a leaflet and a pitch. It was our ‘paper version’ of the solution, as we had not worked out the details of the Innovate for Inclusion programme yet. We needed to test the assumption that teachers would be willing to participate in the Innovate for Inclusion programme and embrace the inclusion of blind youth in their classes. If this assumption was valid, then we could further develop the innovation programme. If this was not valid, we would have to stop with this prototype and develop another one.

On the last day of our five day sprint we visited two vocational training centers and met with teachers from different departments. Their first response was: ‘It is impossible to teach blind students’. After a second thought, and after listening to our pitch, they started to come up with suggestions to overcome barriers in their own classrooms. Although our intention was only to gauge their interest in our programme, we had touched their creativity; they started to open their minds and come up with solutions for the problems they had visualized in the beginning! This was an indication that we were on the right track.

Beside the teachers, the deans of the two training centers also gave their commitment. Sisay, who has a visual impairment and is one of the core team members, expressed his excitement about the approach: ‘wow, we are actually doing something’. He was so used to workshops which were all good ideas written on big flip chart sheets but with little action afterwards. With this success, all members were committed to contribute to the lab and continue with the experiment we had set up.
In the co-creation session in the vocational training institutes was the first real test of our prototype for the “Innovate for Inclusion” programme. In this co-creation session we used the methodology of a design sprint in a pressure cooker format, as we only had one day. This led to different prototypes for adaptive tools and machines. Hence the title: a prototype within a prototype.

But we were not there yet...

The five-day design sprint was over, and everyone went back to their regular duties. The lab team felt a need for a schedule and a plan for the way forward. The facilitators and the local team had not made very clear decisions on the length of the next design cycles. The two persons who had been asked to facilitate the lab methodology were not based in Ethiopia, meaning that further support was done from a distance and therefore was limited.

One month after the design sprint the core group had a planning meeting to further develop the Innovate for Inclusion prototype. Instead of working on the prototype, they decided to give the vocational training teachers a two week training on inclusive education. This was not the solution that had been developed, but rather a transfer of knowledge. Fortunately, the facilitators were able to bring this up and discuss it with the team members. They recognized it, but didn’t know how to go on.

Being stuck is one of the risks of running a lab, and the trick is to accept it, work with it and use it as an opportunity for growth. And so we did. We decided to move on and have a co-creation session in a vocational training institute with teachers, regular students and blind students. The aim was to identify obstacles for the blind students and to create practical solutions for it. This time we only had one day. We got the commitment of the dean and selected four departments: electricity, hair dressing, furniture / wood work, and garment / textile.
We had a very simple programme for the day: in each of the four departments we had one or two classrooms where a teacher, a group of three or four students, one blind student, and one person from our core team came together. After a short introduction of the day, the participants walked around and noted all the possible barriers that they could see for blind youth. Most of the challenges had to do with the tools and machines in the classroom. Then, the participants were stimulated to come up with practical, hands-on solutions. They worked individually or in pairs to sketch it. The group selected one solution and developed the first prototype. These were made of paper, wood or plastic. One example was the design of an electrical circuit. This is usually done on paper with standardized symbols, which cannot be seen by blind persons. The group designed a tactile circuit using Styrofoam, wires and paper. This way the blind students would be able to feel the design and make their own circuit; a very good idea, as this is the basis of understanding electricity.

At the end of the day the different groups presented their solutions to the other groups. In one day we had five prototypes of accessible tools and machines.
The most important outcome was not the adaptations of the machines; it was the change in the mindset of the teachers and students. In one day they had changed their perspective from ‘too difficult to include’ to ‘we can actually do something ourselves’. By asking them to use their own creativity we had given the power to them. This was best expressed by the group of students working in the electricity department: “There are no barriers. We are able to tackle them all.” This was an attitude towards their blind fellows that we had never experienced!

The team now saw the impact of the Innovate for Inclusion approach and organised a second co-creation session, this time allowing for a three-day session. We were glad with the commitment of the training center to make time available for the teachers.

We have good prototypes for accessible machines now: an adaptation of a sewing machine, a protection for a sawing machine, the tactile electrical circuit and an electrical voltage meter with sound. They are not ready to be used in the classroom yet. Our next step is to involve Addis Ababa Science and Technology University (AASTU) to make adaptable machines that can be used in the furniture department’s classrooms. The furniture department was chosen in particular because the prototypes developed there showed the highest feasibility and the biggest potential. Shortly after this writing, the first blind students will be enrolled in the training center in Addis Ababa.

If the adaptations for the machines work, then they can be transferred to other training institutes. However, what is more interesting is that we now have a methodology that develops adaptations for blind students that changes the mindset of students and teachers at the same time. Rather than share the adaptations for the machines, it may be more effective to offer a similar exploration and design programme to other institutes. More important than the products were the learning, the fun, and the growth in confidence of the teachers and the students!
Case 3.
AgriLab - Cambodia: human centred design to improve the livelihoods of farmers with disabilities

Cambodia is a largely agricultural society, with around 80% of its population living in (semi) rural areas. Yet, we know from our work in the local communities we work with, people with disabilities are often excluded from farming activities. This can leave them underutilised and marginalised from participating in the family economy.

They are often excluded from farming because of physical challenges and the lack of simple assistive devices to make farming more suitable for them. At the same time, they are excluded from the existing agricultural cooperatives, which means they miss out on accessing trainings, subsidies, market opportunities and more.

To explore the challenge in more depth, we held a series of meetings with existing and potential stakeholders. We also commissioned a small situation/problem analysis on the concept of inclusive agriculture. During this process, we met local partners and farmers, as well as Engineers without Borders Cambodia, and Massey University from New Zealand.

Light for the World has knowledge about disability inclusion, inclusive facilitation and an understanding of the situation of farmers with a disability in Cambodia. But we didn’t know enough to solve the problem alone, so we partnered with Massey University - who had worked with participatory design and had research skills - and Engineers without Borders - an organisation with technical engineering expertise and experience in developing technical prototypes. They also contracted facilitators from Agile Development Group who helped us facilitate workshops in Khmer.

As a first step to solving the challenge of affordable assistive devices, we set up a series of discussion spaces with farming communities to tease out the root causes of the challenges and explore appropriate solutions together.

We had two rounds of discussion spaces: one with a farming community in Kampong Chhang and one with a community in Pursat. The farmers were brought on board through close collaboration with local organisations that Light for the World had established trusted relationships with. 91 individuals participated in total. In Kampong Chhang, 42% of the participants had a disability. The second time, we decided to include more farmers, especially women, with disabilities to really be able to focus on their specific needs. So in Pursat, 90% of the participants had a disability themselves.
During these discussion spaces, we used a participatory human centred design approach, where the farmers and ‘technicians’ analysed their problems and developed solutions in a participatory and iterative manner. In all of the discussion spaces, we applied the following five principles: empathy, inclusion of all participants, person-centered not technology-centered, safety and social empowerment.

First, training sessions were held to boost participants’ creative capacity building. The group talked about problem-solving and how this was already used in their day-to-day lives. They talked about design and practiced problem solving by designing a mango-picker product and doing an activity where they used paper and cardboard to keep bananas off the ground.

Having practiced creativity and the design process, during the following sessions we then moved on to identifying challenges and thinking of possible solutions.

Throughout the course of the sessions, the farmers identified and prioritised five main challenges that they could start brainstorming solutions to.

These challenges were:

- The scatter approach to rice planting is not so efficient and requires extra physical work for persons with disabilities and the elderly.
- People with mobility impairments, especially wheelchair users, are not able to participate in essential farming activities such as ploughing.
- People with mobility impairments find it difficult to carry tools and produce (for example, cassava) to and around their fields and find it slippery when it is wet or muddy.
- Persons with visual impairments find it difficult to feed and care for chickens because the coops are difficult to navigate.
- It is difficult for wheelchair users to collect and carry water from source to farm each day to water their crops.

In total, the farmers designed five different prototypes for accessible farming equipment: a rice seeder, an accessible ploughing cart, a modified chicken coop, a motorised cassava harvest cart, and a water transport cart.

**Overview of Project: Solutions**

- **Rice Seeding Product**
- **Water Transport Cart**
The developed prototypes

- **Rice seeder:** A low cost drum seeder to allow mobility and vision impaired individuals to sow rice seed more effectively. It currently still needs some minor refinements to make sure the frame is rigid enough for use.

- **Accessible ploughing cart:** a cart that can attach to an existing ox-drawn plough to allow mobility-impaired individuals to plough their fields. It can be useful, and community members were motivated to continue developing it, but the cart still needs continued refinement.

- **Accessible chicken coop:** modifications to a chicken coop to allow visually impaired individuals to navigate the chicken coop and interact with the chickens more efficiently. Unfortunately, it was decided not to test this prototype further, as the chicken coop was not accepted by the family that was asked to test it. Chicken rearing is such an important means of income for the family that they were too afraid to adapt the coop in case it didn’t work. Access for persons with a disability was not perceived as valuable enough for the associated risk.

- **Motorised cassava harvest cart:** This cart was specially designed to be high off the ground, as cassava as a crop grows in quite furrowed ground. It also contained a pulley system lever to help lift heavy produce (such as cassava) into the cart.

- **Water transport cart:** The water transport cart is a cart that can be connected to a wheelchair. This helps persons with mobility problems in fetching and transporting water and other essential items. The cart that was developed during the session was transferred to one of the wheelchair users, who now uses and maintains it.
The prototypes that were developed in 2017 and 2018 are currently in use by individuals, or in need of a bit more refinement before they are fully ready for use. Some initial steps to further develop the prototypes have been taken in Pursat. Ideally, a next step would be to see if it is appropriate and feasible to develop a business plan for a small production line of these devices in the communities.

Parallel to the development of appropriate assistive devices is the need to further explore the potential of linking with existing agricultural cooperatives or supporting their capacity to develop their own. This needs careful collaboration with local government. In Kampong Chhnang, this process has already started with the Ministry of Agriculture. We hope to embed this work into the national efforts to improve the situation of farmers with disability to improve their livelihoods.

What makes the AgriLab interesting is that it brought together people in a marginalized position and helped them identify their problems, agree on the prioritization of the problems, develop ideas and create and test solutions together. The users have been in the center from the start to the end. They have not been seen as a beneficiary or passive receiver of information, but rather as creative people who can solve their own problems drawing on their vast bank of local knowledge. Research carried out during this process demonstrated that this process brought them from passive acceptance of the problems to an active mode and belief in their own creativity and problem solving capacities.6

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Case 4.
InBusiness: Micro-entrepreneurs as business partner

Light for the World has been supporting youth with a disability in their search for employment for several years. Although we initially focused on wage employment, we soon found out that only 20% of the youth that we work with were able to find waged employment. There is a very small group that opted for a business career and that has been able to set up their own small or medium sized company. The majority of our target group, however, has no other opportunity than to step into some form of self-employment, usually working in the unofficial sectors of the economy like street vending and maintaining their own small micro-enterprise

We know that many people in this sector are struggling to earn a decent income. But we also realised that we had little knowledge about the needs of people that own and run micro businesses.

To understand their situation better, we started with a problem analysis. We talked to experts like micro-finance institutes and studied interventions of other organisations. This helped us to better understand the (micro) business sector. Light for the World was also asked to evaluate the micro-finance programme run by another NGO, which gave us good insights as well.

In addition, we organised a survey among micro-entrepreneurs with a disability in order to understand their business performance, barriers faced and possible solutions. This survey was critical for refining the problem. What we learned from the survey was that for these micro-entrepreneurs, (lack of) access to business development services is more important than access to finances. Most of them need only little capital, and if they need it they may be able to attract some from family members or relatives. Business development services are offered to bigger companies but not to micro-entrepreneurs, despite this group indicating that they have a need for services such as business training, consultancy, marketing, information, technology development and transfer, business linkage promotion, etc.

As our initial assumption was that the lack of credit would be the main obstacle, we had to change our focus from improving access to finance to providing business development support.

We developed a partnership with organisations that had an interest in the same topic, as they are also working on inclusive economic development and business training. The partners were Proportion Foundation and their Kenyan counterpart Vijana Reloaded, the design company And The People, and Kenasvit.

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7 Micro-enterprise means a firm or a business activity whose annual turnover does not exceed 500,000 KSh (5000 euro) and which employs less than ten people according to the Micro and Small Enterprises Act.

8 Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders
Learning from mistakes

Looking back, we had too many Netherlands-based partners; Light for the World, Proportion Foundation, and And The People are all Dutch organisations. Only Vijana Reloaded and Kenasvit were based in Kenya. We thus lacked operational capacity in Kenya.

A more thorough mapping of partner organisations before the survey would have helped us to find local organisations with expertise and capacity in the area of micro-business development.

In a later stage BoP Inc came on board, which brought in the expertise of business development for the Base of the Pyramid and which has an office in Kenya.

In order to understand the specific business environment, we decided to select three types of businesses and mapped their value chain, business process and business environment. The three types of businesses were: shoe makers and textile, road side retailing, and beadwork and carvings. This helped us understand their supply chain, the value they added and their clients and potential clients.

We then developed our first prototype: a business training for micro-entrepreneurs. We called it a bootcamp. We chose to test it in Nakuru town because the town provided a mixture of urban and peri-urban dynamics, as we wanted to test both area types. We wanted to work in an inclusive way and invited youth, women and persons with a disability who owned a micro-business. The bootcamp had a duration of three times half a day (so that the entrepreneurs could earn an income to rest of the day). We had twenty participants with different types of businesses (waste picking, shoe making, motorbike renting, chicken rearing, crisps making, etc.). Despite the positive response that the participants gave during the evaluation of the bootcamp, only two of the twenty returned for the follow-up session. This demonstrated that the value added by the bootcamp just wasn’t good enough for the users. We didn’t want to pursue a prototype that is not good enough, so we built in time to reflect and improve.

In the first round we had focused on business training and underestimated the business linkages: creating a link between micro-entrepreneurs and bigger companies. As we saw the need to go more in the direction of business development and business linkage, we did an inventory in three areas where we saw opportunities for the participants of the bootcamp: shoe production, marketing on the street and the supply of products to the government via the platform for government procurement (AGPO).

We found a company interested in street-marketing and chose to go with that. The company Happy Cow produces yoghurt drinks and other dairy products. They agreed to work with us to further develop and test the business linkage concept. Together, we decided to develop a two-tier distribution and sales model of their new yoghurt product that was destined for the low-end consumer market.

20 established shopkeepers in Nakuru town agreed to take part in testing the concept. Persons with a disability owned two of these shops, 15 were owned by women and 18 were operated by individuals below the age of 35 years. Each of the shopkeepers was matched with five street vendors, the majority of whom were youth and people with disabilities.
We provided coaching and mentorship of the vendors as required to build product and brand loyalty, sustainable last mile distribution channels and an after sales feedback loop from the customer to Happy Cow. The vendors got caps and t-shirts with the Happy Cow logo and did the marketing and sales on the street. They derived their products from the shop keepers.

The test showed that after a period of five months, the shopkeeper’s daily sales through the street vendors increased from 10 pieces to 50 pieces on average per day, for a higher margin per piece. The test also revealed improved marketing and communication skills among shopkeepers and street vendors towards the low-end consumer market. We also identified a brand image improvement and loyalty within the distribution chain. The street vendors still continue to work with Happy Cow.

After all this refinement, we developed the InBusiness model. We are now testing the same model with Happy Cow in other parts of the country and we are developing partnerships with other companies.

The basis of the model is that we bring groups of micro-entrepreneurs, established companies and business development service providers together to develop new business models. Through such a platform we encourage and foster close business linkages between micro enterprises and established companies. The micro-entrepreneurs can then work either upstream as suppliers or downstream as vendors and salespersons. It offers the micro-entrepreneurs a more stable situation to grow and sustain their business.

After an intensive dialogue with an external donor, we have received the financial means to validate the model of business linkages and business development further. The dialogue with the donor was very important for us, as they supported us in understanding how to select entrepreneurs and how to track performance. In addition, the donor understands that this is still a new concept, and that time and resources are needed to further test the approach, be flexible and adapt the concept as needed.
Reflections on setting up and managing a lab programme

The four cases described how we have followed a methodology of exploration, trial and error, involvement of potential users, adapting and improving and action learning. In this chapter, we reflect on what we have realised with regards to the process of organising a lab, arranging for inclusion, and the donor relationship that needs to be in place to successfully set up and implement a lab.

Process

When it comes to the process of the lab programme, there are a few key insights and success factors that can be taken into account:

Making your assumptions explicit helps you think through your solution

Each solution is based on certain assumptions. These may be conscious or unconscious, and can be one of two types:

1. Assumptions about prerequisites: these are assumptions about what the critical elements are that need to be in place for the solution to work as planned. For example, in our Ethiopian lab the assumption was that teachers would be able and willing to invest time and energy in a programme for the inclusion of blind youth.

2. Assumptions about the performance of the potential solution: these are assumptions about what is going to happen if the solution works the way we think it should work. For example, for the Make 12.4% Work Campaign in Uganda, we assumed that the campaign would have a large enough pull factor for companies and development organisations to join.

Being explicit in your assumptions can help you in testing your solution: if a solution does not work as planned, did it not work because the solution wasn’t good, or was it simply that something you assumed would be in place was not there?

Getting user input and feedback in a very early phase avoids designing something that will not work

Involving potential users and asking for their feedback as soon as possible means you may avoid designing something that is not suited to their situation and their interest. In Ethiopia, for example, we visited teachers at vocational training centers to ask for their feedback on our Innovate for Inclusion prototype, even though we only had a sketch and idea for the programme. We wanted to gauge their interest and get their feedback on the ideas so that we could drop an idea if they didn’t think it would work. Based on their positive feedback, we made a few improvements and continued on with the prototype.

It is preferable to work on location

Ideally, design sprints and other workshops are organised at the location where the problem or solution is. Working on-site gives the opportunity to directly work with potential users and perform quick tests. With that, it avoids working in a bubble and helps the participants keep the user in mind and be reminded of the environment they are residing in. In Ethiopia, we
noted a clear difference between the first design sprint, which was held at a fancy co-working space in Addis Ababa, and the second sprint which was held at a vocational training center. In the co-working space it felt as if we were designing for someone, but when working on-site we were co-creating with the teachers and the students.

**Distinct roles for a facilitator and a designer**

Lab activities are usually carried out in short sprints - a quick cycle of group work where problem analysis, idea generation, solution development, testing and improvement take place. Ideally, there are a designated facilitator and designer in the group.

It is not always easy for a group to develop new concepts and ideas. A facilitator can stimulate the group to think outside the box, and make sure the group work moves from step to step as needed. A designer can take part in the group work as a team member, and give examples of possible designs or solutions. This can be an industrial designer when we aim for a technical solution like in the case of Cambodia, or a graphic designer when we aim for a communication product or campaign like in the case of Make 12.4% Work. After idea generation, the designer can take the lead in developing the first prototype.

**Building team spirit stimulates trust, safety and, ultimately, cooperation**

The members of the lab will be working together as a team for several days, or even weeks or months. Trust and safety among the team is crucial. A facilitator can support this by, for instance, checking in with team members at the beginning and end of the day. How are they feeling? Is there anything they missed or would need?

This also applies to working in sessions with potential users of the solution. Prepare them by explaining the purpose of the lab and take the time to create a safe and open environment. Taking the time and listening to their stories increases the motivation and understanding of lab participants. Energizers can be used not only to increase the level of energy in the room, but also to stimulate internal cooperation and team spirit.

**Setting up and managing a lab needs shared ownership**

One organisation could take the initiative, but the principle of the lab and the prototypes produced is a shared ownership. We apply open boundaries: organisations can come in as a partner at a later stage if they feel connected with the challenge that the lab team has set for themselves. Most of our labs had a core team that felt responsible for managing the lab and boundary partners that participated in design sprints and the development of some of the prototypes.

A shared ownership and a shared responsibility also mean that all parties benefit from the results and the visibility of the lab. In Uganda, where Light for the World was the initiator of the lab, we created a brand, the Make 12.4% Work campaign, where all parties, including the ambassadors and members of the initiative, are visible.

**Failures give new insight and are the start of something better**

Developing new solutions for current challenges means taking risks, investing time in experimentation and creating room for both failures and successes. Failing fast and failing often is one of the principles of a lab programme. But that doesn’t make it any easier.

In InBusiness, our first prototype - a one-and-a-half day business training for micro-entrepreneurs - was not good enough, and we realised this when only two of the twenty participating entrepreneurs came back for the follow
up session. This was a surprise to us, as the majority had indicated that they had benefited from the training. We realised that the micro-entrepreneurs are very cautious of their time and we had to offer value that is immediately seen by them. We had to go through another design cycle that eventually led to a much better solution for building business linkages and developing new business models with established companies.

Inclusion

We believe a lab works best when the process is inclusive of different types of viewpoints, organisations, and abilities.

**Having persons with disabilities at the heart of the co-creation process**

In our Social Innovation Labs we always deal with matters that concern disability inclusion - addressing barriers that stand in the way of persons with disabilities accessing services, programmes, jobs, and community activities. So for us it has been essential that persons with disabilities are at the core of the co-creation process, not only as potential users but as experts, because of their lived experiences that relate to the challenges that we aim to address with the labs. They are not only represented in the lab, but have a leading voice in our design sessions. To enhance full participation, we ensure that our facilitation methods are accessible to persons with disabilities; for example, by working with sign language interpreters, adapting the pace of the sessions to allow time to explain visualizations for participants who are not be able to see them, brailing of handouts and organising the sessions in accessible locations. These accessible methods should not only be implemented during the design process, but also during testing and upscaling.

**Building a diverse team boosts creativity**

A lab brings together different types of people to create solutions to problems. If the team that is brought in is diverse, they can look at the problem from different angles, depending on their expertise. Bringing in people from different types of organisations, such as non-profits, government agencies, academic institutes, educational institutes, and businesses, brings together different knowledge areas. It helps to also invite people who have no experience with the topic in question but who can bring in other expertise or experiences related to the issue. For example, when we had a design sprint as a part of the Livelihood Improvement Challenge, somebody came in to tell us about a model where village health workers are trained as Healthy Entrepreneurs, making an income out of selling health products and at the same time reaching out to remote communities with health education. This gave us the idea of including persons with disabilities as Healthy Entrepreneurs, so that they could reach out to families that have persons with disabilities, and persons with disabilities themselves with health related information and information about available livelihood opportunities. At the same time, the Healthy Entrepreneurs with a disability would be able to gain an income, change mindsets about the abilities of persons with disabilities by being a role model in their community, as well as share information about disability, disability specific services and livelihood opportunities available to their peers.
Design with, rather than for, the user

In each case we have made a point of inviting representatives of the group of potential users to participate in the lab team. This way, we ensure that we are ‘designing with the user’ rather than ‘designing for a specific target group’. It can also speed up the process as they can quickly give input on whether or not they think a solution would work for them. In Cambodia, for example, the prototypes were developed by farmers with disabilities and technical experts together, leading to more viable solutions that are actually relevant to the lives of the farmers. In Uganda, young persons were in the lead during the design as well as the testing of the Make 12.4% Work prototype.

Besides involving users in the labs, listening to the potential users to truly understand their problems and needs ensures a good basis for developing solutions. Don’t forget to take into account the diversity of the potential users, e.g. rural versus urban, richer versus poorer, different age groups, etc. In addition, take care to include groups that may be less visible, such as persons with psychosocial disabilities.

Funding arrangements

Despite being innovative and exciting, even labs cost time and money, and need to be funded somehow. To make this work, we need to establish a funding relationship that is flexible and based on trust and shared values.

Working with a lab methodology requires innovative and understanding funders

First of all it is important that the donor understands the principles of the Social Lab Methodology, with a focus on co-creation, experimentation and innovation. This will have to resonate with the values and guiding principles of the donor. Many donors mostly want to see high impact results and avoid risk; such a donor might prefer a relationship that is guided by predefined outcomes and impact results formulated in a logframe, and is most likely not an appropriate funder for a lab.

A lab requires a donor that has an interest in system change and addressing unanswered challenges with innovative solutions. A donor that values people-led development, ownership, system change and innovation, and understands that this goes hand in hand with relationship building, exploring new concepts, testing and failing, and continuous improvement and adaptation.

Regular communication and updates to the donor are key

The moment the proposal for the lab project or activity has been approved and the budget is released, there is an agreement on the process but not yet on the prototype and the activities it entails. The nature of the prototyping and testing is that (elements of) solutions might fail, need to be expanded or modified, and that new ideas might come up that add value to the original prototype. This is why the initiator of the lab - the party that receives the funds - needs to establish short lines of communication with the donor beyond regular project reporting. We cannot expect a funder to approve the dynamics as mentioned above, without a clear explanation and justification on why certain amendments are proposed. Even better, the funding party might be a partner in discussing certain challenges faced, or sparring about new ideas that have emerged in the process of testing the prototype.

Untended outcomes

One of the unintended outcomes of a lab can be new forms of cooperation! Organisations that meet at the lab workshops start exchanging knowledge, expertise and business cards, developing a network that may last beyond the lab assignment. In one of our co-creation sessions where we were looking at developing a communication tool to enhance inclusion of youth with visual and hearing impairments in a government Youth Livelihood Program in Uganda, a person with a hearing impairment who participated in the session linked up with the representative from government and was able to discuss a business plan he has with a group of other youth with and without disabilities. This will most likely result in funding for this group.

Doubling up

In Uganda, our potential users were youth with disabilities. We therefore wanted to carry out a scoping study and learning expedition to understand more about what they were really struggling with when it came to their inclusion in livelihood and employment. To build even more ownership of the process, youth with disabilities were also the ones to lead, manage and carry out both the study and the learning expedition. This empowered the youth with disabilities, enhanced their understanding of issues at stake, and also resulted in different dynamics during the project visits. There was more openness in the discussions since youth were interacting with youth, and already during the Learning Expedition change was brought about and mindsets were changed about the abilities of persons with disabilities. This opened our eyes and actually nurtured the idea of working with Disability Inclusion Facilitators.
Partnering with the National Lottery Community Fund

The Livelihood Improvement Challenge, which resulted in the Make 12.4% Work Initiative in Uganda, was funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) as part of their East African Disability Fund (EADF).

As part of its refreshed strategy, NLCF stresses people-led development and system change toward more disability inclusive development, including working through a co-creation process. This is a perfect match with the Social Innovation Lab methodology and we share the vision that this is a way to go when working towards disability inclusive development.

Right at the start it was clear the NLCF valued the choice to put young persons with disabilities in the lead, and they supported each step in the development of the Make 12.4% Work Initiative. NLCF representatives visited Uganda several times, interacted with the Disability Inclusion Facilitators and engaged with other stakeholders involved. They witnessed how the Initiative grew and evolved, and supported the Disability Inclusion Academy, the Internship Program, and other ideas that came up along the way, but were never part of the original, approved project proposal. The team at the Fund knows the programme well and support Light for the World and the implementing team as the ideas emerge and develop by providing critical feedback and suggestions for improvement. This open partnership has brought the Make 12.4% Work Initiative to the level it is now!

Conclusion

There is still a long way to go in creating an inclusive society where everyone’s potential is unlocked and people with disabilities can break out of the vicious cycle of poverty and vulnerability. There are good practices that deserve to be continued or scaled up. However, at the same time, there are still many problems that are not addressed by present practices. Just to name a few: the high unemployment rate of persons with a disability, negative societal attitudes, the lack of assistive technology, the double discrimination of women with (intellectual) disabilities, the exclusion of people with psychosocial disabilities and the lack of a supportive policy environment to enable persons with a disability to set up their own profitable micro-enterprise.

These challenges need new approaches and new solutions.

It is obvious that government organisations, non-profit organisations nor businesses can tackle these challenges alone. These challenges require a multi-stakeholder approach with room for exploration and experimentation to work toward system change. An environment is needed where ideas can be generated and tested. Failures must not be punished but used, and experimentation encouraged, so that new insights can be gained and new solutions can be designed.

The Social Innovation Lab approach is an approach that provides a platform for organisations to be inspired and to search for new solutions together. People that ‘own’ the problem are not regarded as beneficiaries only, but as creative human beings that are part of the design process and the solution itself.

The Social Innovation Lab approach is human centered design in a multi-stakeholder setting.

9 Former Big Lottery Fund, based in the United Kingdom.
Effective Social Innovation processes require flexible funding processes that include dialogue and frequent communication. This asks for openness on the side of the initiator of the lab as well as understanding and engagement of the funder. This does not mean that we have to move away from a value for money approach: a lab starts with small investments and slim resources to test out new approaches (the ‘prototyping’ methodology). Only when solutions have proven results do we scale up and consume bigger budgets. At the same time, a funder will need to be aware that real innovation comes both with failure and success, and is a time intensive process.

In the title of this document we relate Innovation to Inclusion. We trust that the four cases show that the Social Lab Methodology is an interesting and relevant methodology to find new solutions to mainstreaming disability in development. The nature of the methodology fosters inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities to make disability inclusion a reality in their environment.

In all the four cases we have described, we have only just started: we now see the first results. Some prototypes will be tested further. Some are mature enough and are ready to be scaled up. Collaboration is valued by the partners involved. Work is still in progress, but we have come a long way already.

We hope that with this publication we have been able to share our reflections and inspire organisations and donors to invest in innovative approaches to promote inclusion and co-design.
Light for the World 2019

Photographs: Andrew Drain (pictures Cambodia), Lidya Argaw (pictures EmployAble), Peter Vlam (pictures Make 12.4% Work). All other pictures Light for the World

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