



Disability Inclusion in Agriculture: PRISMA's Key Learnings for Development Practitioners

Introduction and Background on Disability Inclusion

PRISMA is a partnership established in 2013 between the Government of Indonesia's Ministry of National Development Planning and the Government of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and aims to improve the productivity and income of smallholder farmers. PRISMA builds commercially sustainable business models with businesses and government partners to increase the availability of productivity-enhancing products, services, and technologies. PRISMA has worked with more than 250 agribusinesses and market actors and benefitted over 1.48 million smallholder farmer households. At the heart of PRISMA's strategy is social inclusion and collaboration.

PRISMA's commitment to inclusivity means reaching and supporting key segments of the population that are often left out. This includes farmers and other agriculture market actors who live with disabilities. Throughout the program, PRISMA tested and adapted its approach to disability-inclusive development in the Indonesian rural context. Within this setting, PRISMA has overcome challenges such as limited understanding and a lack of practical knowledge about disability inclusion in agriculture through prioritizing raising awareness and deepening understanding of disability in agriculture among the private sector and local and national governments. PRISMA developed this brief to help development practitioners more effectively engage with people with disability in the agricultural sector based on the project's experiences and lessons learned.

Disability in Indonesia: According to [the UN](#), there are 38.8 million people in Indonesia who are categorized as persons with disabilities. Agriculture is the primary employer for people with disabilities, with 46%-48% working in this sector. Despite high levels of engagement, people with disability are often (unintentionally) excluded from farming activities and cannot access the necessary resources to reach their full potential. This finding is especially alarming considering that 39% of Indonesian farmers 55 and older will experience some form of disability, such as difficulty with vision, hearing, or movement.

PRISMA's Technical Approach to Disability Inclusion (DI): Meeting the needs of rural farmers

PRISMA tailored its approach to disability-inclusive development to fit the Indonesian farming context by focusing on accessibility and participation improvements:

- 1. Accessibility improvement** – boosts physical and material access to ensure that physical spaces are easily accessible and materials easily understood.
- 2. Participation improvement** – directly involving farmers with disabilities and includes activities such as capacity-building events to ensure they have the resources necessary to reach their full potential.

Over three years, PRISMA has implemented 16 disability-inclusive activities across ten agriculture sectors, including beef, dairy, rice, and maize. In achieving these works, PRISMA consulted consistently with disability organisations, as strongly encouraged by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The following sections highlight key activities and the lessons learned during implementation.

Accessibility Improvement

Accessibility, especially to information and products, is a fundamental challenge for people with disabilities in the agriculture sector. While private companies have an opportunity to address these concerns, they have made very limited efforts to do so due to a limited understanding of the challenges and opportunities.

PRISMA experienced that universal design (UD) approach¹ could improve accessibility. Applying UD and its principles may assist companies to reaching a wider range of customers, including people with disabilities. Many leading companies, such as Microsoft and Ikea, have adopted UD in their product designs. However, it is not widely understood or commonly implemented by agribusinesses and development programs. PRISMA saw this as an opportunity to promote the principles to its partners.

PRISMA supported nine agribusiness partners to incorporate UD principles into their promotional activities. These companies added clear subtitles and narration to some of their promotional videos. Posters and brochures with complex narratives and backgrounds were replaced with simplified layouts and informative illustrations. In addition, hard-to-read cursive text in the packaging was replaced with larger fonts and contrasting colors. The partner companies also consulted the targeted people with disabilities to ensure that these low-cost adjustments improve overall readability and hearability, product instructions, and thereby, make messages easier to understand.

The partner companies also applied UD principles in hosting socialisation events. Providing easy access to venue, sufficient space for crutches and wheelchair users, or reserving front row seats for people with auditory or visual impairments, were some of the examples that allowed people with impairments to join socialisation events. Additionally, companies ensured that presentations had clear, visible, and readable content, further assisting participants with disabilities to absorb the information.

PRISMA documented these tips and recommendations in its [Accessibility Guidelines](#). The guidelines provide practical steps for the private sector to improve accessibility to information and knowledge to reach a diverse range of people, including farmers with disabilities or limitations.

PRISMA learned that convincing partners to invest in design changes can be difficult, especially if additional investment was needed. Limited resources, lack of understanding, and differing priorities were among the most common challenges. However, by ensuring the alignment with the partner's objectives, sharing the risks through co-investing, and choosing the appropriate pitching time such as when they were already planning to design new promotional material, partners will be more willing to follow the principles.

Key recommendations to operationalize accessibility improvements:

1. The accessibility improvements of products and services must be consulted and confirmed to people with disabilities.
2. Prepare a 'business case' and align this with their business strategy.
3. Anticipate a significant co-investment and risk sharing requests from the companies.

Participation Improvement

Farmers with disabilities are commonly unnoticed and excluded, leading to social disconnection with their communities. They are rarely invited to events or may hesitate to attend due to social barriers. This challenge is worsened by agribusinesses' lack of awareness about these farmers' presence and potential. Without a targeted approach, farmers with disabilities risk missing out on essential supports, such as access to farming services and knowledge, while companies miss valuable opportunities to grow their business through engaging this underrepresented group.

PRISMA learned that raising agribusinesses' awareness is essential to addressing this issue. Evidently, companies with better understanding of farmers with disabilities' potential are more likely to engage with them and tailor their business approaches to meet with these farmers' unique needs and challenges. In one of PRISMA's partnership in the livestock sector, the partner utilised local networks to identify these farmers, provided in-person briefing before the event, and invited caregivers to join. During the event, the facilitator communicated in a clear and straightforward language, and provided opportunities for questions to ensure all participants, including farmers with disabilities, fully understood the materials.

Improving participation can also be achieved by giving strategic roles to farmers with disabilities, such as demonstration plot leader, as demonstrated in another PRISMA partnership with PT NuFeed International Indonesia (NuFeed), an animal feed company². Qualified farmers with disabilities collaborated with the partners

through leading demonstration plots to showcase good agricultural practices while promoting the companies' products. Many of these farmers later testified anecdotally that they felt more confident in interacting with others and were motivated to continue the practices, indicating a positive shift in stigma reduction.

In addition to conducting these activities, PRISMA consulted with disability organisations to ensure the approaches were aligned with the needs of farmers with disabilities. Disability organisations have existing relationships with farmers with disabilities and could help connect PRISMA and companies with these farmers in a meaningful way. This was highly crucial in providing advice and recommendations, while connecting PRISMA, its partners, and the targeted people in the communities.

Key recommendations to operationalize participation improvements:

1. Consult with people with disabilities to understand barriers/enablers of their participation in farming activities
2. Raise awareness and provide technical assistance to business partners to incorporate accommodations
3. Engage local organisations or communities that can act as a bridge builder
4. Ask for feedback and incorporate learnings into future engagements

Key Learnings

PRISMA found that improving participation was significantly more challenging than boosting accessibility, but disability inclusion hinges upon advancing both. Key challenges for increasing participation in market activities for farmers with disabilities include social stigma and inaccessible venues, lack of access to information, challenges building partnerships with disability organizations, and an overall lack of market sector awareness of people with disabilities. Lastly, more data is needed to understand the challenges and needs of this community in addition to the impact of DI interventions.

Challenge: Establishing a starting point for disability inclusive market is difficult due to lack of practical examples and specific information on the disability community and their prevalence.

Key Lesson: Enhancing accessibility serves as a potential starting point. PRISMA experienced that adapting universal design principles can be an initial approach, as it benefits a wide range of population, including those with milder form of disabilities, such as elderly, and even people without disabilities. However, reaching people with more severe form of disabilities may require more specialised, tailored approaches.

Challenge: Simply providing accessible services and events does not always resulted with active participation of people with disabilities. Additionally, individuals with disabilities can be difficult to identify, as they may participate less in social circles

Key Lesson: Collaborate with local agents and Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to connect businesses with farmers with disabilities and better understand their needs. OPDs or other disability-focused organizations are key to reaching people with disabilities.

Challenge: Seeking support from OPDs can be challenging. Many are unfamiliar with market-systems approach or inexperienced in private sector engagement.

Key Lesson: Development program should utilize the existing connections, including the extended network from the government counterpart or the donor. It is also essential to understand the capacity, needs, and goals of the approached OPDs to build a mutually beneficial collaboration.

Challenge: Limited market awareness of farmers with disabilities as a customer base. Private sector companies often have no reference points for this community, their needs, or the potential market opportunity present.

Key Lesson: Raising awareness among businesses through workshops or by sharing best practice examples can make this population more visible. PRISMA found that providing strategic support to private sector partners, including risk-sharing or co-investment options, enhance their willingness to adopt disability-inclusive business models. Collaboration with OPDs will also play a critical role in building agribusinesses' interest while making the approach more effective.

Conclusion

Overall, disability inclusion in Market Systems Development programs is achievable, and there are opportunities for private sector companies to contribute. However, partners and stakeholders may need to be provided with basic awareness and knowledge on the issues, and may require support in implementing the approaches. In highlighting the success of inclusive approaches and unlocking the full potential of farmers with disabilities –both as a segment and as individuals– it is essential to address the social impacts in addition to commercial benefits.

Disability is a multifaceted issue, and interventions must be tailored to address the diverse challenges faced by people with disabilities. To be effective, interventions must be flexible and context-specific to meet the unique needs of each individual and developed in close consultation with people with disability and their representative associations. Involvement of disability organisations or experts is crucial. Disability inclusion is an ongoing journey and relies on continuous learning, building trust and partnerships, and gathering more comprehensive and reliable data. PRISMA's lessons learned through their implementation experience aim to support other development practitioners to ensure programs are more inclusive for all communities.

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