

Part Two

The practice of Disability Equality training

5 The Disability Equality Training of Trainers (DETOT) course

This chapter describes the course of workshops devised and organised by Oxfam, entitled ‘Disability Equality Training of Trainers’(DETOT). It took place in Kosovo between 1997 and 1998. It built on the 18 months of preparatory work described in Chapter 3, during which Oxfam staff, staff of its partner KAPP (Kosovo Association of People with Paraplegia, now known as Handikos), and community volunteers got to know and trust each other, through holding informal discussions, making home visits, attending group meetings, conducting group work, and running regional workshops. The course represented a more formalised stage in the Disability Equality programme, designed to give participants both the theoretical basis and the practical skills to take on the roles of Disability Equality activists and facilitators.

Aims, objectives, and methodology

The course was developed with support and advice from the President of KAPP. It was based largely on observation, experience, and feedback from participants during the various types of preparatory work described in Chapter 3. All the KAPP Regional Co-ordinators attended a planning meeting at which the basic idea and plans were presented for consultation, and practical details were discussed and agreed.

The overall aim was to develop the capacity of KAPP members to promote Disability Equality and raise awareness of disability in the wider community. In turn, local people, most of them disabled, would be able to educate others, and would reach more people (and do it better) than Oxfam could. The course was therefore designed for people who were already engaged, to some extent, in the activities of the KAPP’s Local Active Groups (LAGs); it was hoped that they would apply the lessons that they learned from the course in their regional structures and individual groups, and draw in those LAG members who were still extremely isolated (physically or psychologically) within their own homes.

The DETOT course had the following specific objectives:

- to raise the participants’ own awareness of human rights and Disability Equality;
- to increase their capacity to change attitudes within their communities, raising awareness of the needs and potential strengths of disabled people;
- to reach out to marginalised disabled people;
- to create a small core group of facilitators who, with further support and input, would be able to lead workshops and discussion groups on the rights of disabled people;

- to encourage discussion of gender-related issues and support the inclusion of women, particularly disabled women, in the LAGs;
- to develop the potential for the creation of a disabled women's support group.

The guiding methodological principle of the course was to create an environment in which participants and facilitators could share experiences and exchange ideas freely. The course was designed according to the principles of adult learning (explained in Chapter 8), to encourage the active involvement of all the participants. Because everybody learns in different ways, it provided a range of varied activities, including whole-group and small-group discussions and exercises, work in pairs and individual work, drawing, drama, posters, oral presentations, poetry, movement, stories, brainstorming, written handouts, and games.

Participants

Participants were chosen by the LAGs and regional structures of the KAPP. The only stipulation was that at least half of the course members should be disabled people. In the event, the final composition of the group was two non-disabled women, nine disabled women, four non-disabled men, and five disabled men. Most members had either participated in the regional introductory workshops or belonged to LAGs with whom Oxfam had done individual preparatory work. Two participants already had some personal experience of facilitating workshop activities.

In two regions of Kosovo it had not been possible to do any preparatory work with individual groups, so the DETOT participants from those regions came to the course with no previous direct involvement in Disability Equality or workshop methods. Overall, the course would probably have been more focused and more effective if the necessary preparatory work had been done with all the participants beforehand.

Initially, the facilitators set a limit of 15 participants (including one Oxfam staff member), in the hope that by the end five or six of them would become facilitators, and the others would apply their learning in other ways in their communities. But in fact the course began with 19 people and ended with 20, which reduced the time available for feedback and discussion, and meant that some issues were covered rather superficially.

Facilitators

The course employed three co-facilitators, working when possible in pairs; guest facilitators were invited to lead a couple of sessions. This exposed participants to various styles of facilitation. When workshops are being designed, two or more facilitators, working together and brainstorming ideas, often work more creatively than a single facilitator working alone. Facilitating activities in pairs also increases effectiveness during workshops: one person takes responsibility for the current activity, while the other is responsible for observing progress and keeping things on track; this is especially useful when a workshop lasts all day.

Scheduling and structure of the course contents

The course was held on one day a week for five months, with two two-week breaks. There were two modules: *Facilitation Skills* and *Disability Equality Issues*. However, to maximise the opportunities for learning, consideration of disability issues was included in activities that focused on facilitation, and vice versa. The idea was for participants to do an activity and learn from it of itself, and then to discuss and consider it from the point of view of a facilitator, answering questions such as: ‘Why did we do that?’, ‘What would this type of activity be useful for?’, ‘Why?’, and ‘What would I do differently, to make it more effective in my own community?’

The first two sessions were devoted to forming the group, setting priorities, and developing agreed ways of working. Seven weeks of developing facilitation skills followed; then seven weeks were spent on exploring disability-related issues, one week on planning, and one week on evaluation, combined with a celebration of the course and of participants’ contributions.

Language

We found that it was best, when possible, for workshops to be conducted in one language. Having to use an interpreter between facilitators and participants slows down communication and leaves less time for activities and discussion. However, it is more important that the participants should use their first language and communicate freely among themselves; so if the facilitator does not speak that language, the use of an interpreter is unavoidable, and more time should be allowed; and/or a more limited coverage of issues should be factored in.

If use is made of an interpreter, however skilled, the facilitator loses a lot of valuable feedback about the thoughts and feelings of the participants. Much of this comes from informal communication: incidental comments and casual conversation during group work, or during breaks. In partial compensation for this, the facilitator must pay close attention to the participants’ body language and the interactions between them. In addition, the interpreter should translate any significant verbal exchange that takes place outside of the main conversation. However, this is asking the impossible of the interpreter: the level of concentration required for workshop interpreting is extremely hard to sustain, and regular breaks are needed. One suggested solution is to use two interpreters in an intensive situation such as a workshop.

Even with sufficient and experienced interpreters, some exercises, such as role plays, are hard to do through translation: the facilitator misses much of the significance of the verbal exchanges and cannot respond appropriately. This does not mean that role plays and improvised drama should necessarily be avoided; but the facilitator must be prepared to give up some control of the situation and trust the participants to manage the activity by themselves.

It is essential that the interpreters should understand the language and ideas of Disability Equality in order to translate the proceedings effectively. Linguistic fluency is less important than the interpreter’s ability to comprehend and communicate the

concepts that facilitators and participants are intending to convey. Time must be set aside in advance to brief the interpreter about the key concepts and vocabulary likely to be used during the course.

The situation in Kosovo was complicated by the fact that there was often no common language between the two main ethnic groups in the community – Serbs and Albanians – and even more so for disabled people and rural women, who had no schooling and therefore had never learned the language of the other community. But experience proved that working in three spoken languages is unsustainable for any large group situation for longer than a couple of hours. Participants lose too much of the main conversations, and the process becomes too time-consuming and tiring for all concerned. Partly for this reason, it was decided to use two languages, Albanian and English, for the DETOT course.

As for the use of sign language with hearing-impaired participants, it was found that interpreting between two spoken languages and sign language in workshops is feasible, as long as sufficient time is allowed, and the key information is made available in the form of written handouts, charts, and drawings on flipcharts.

Materials and activities

The materials and activities were designed specifically for the DETOT course, with much borrowing and adaptation from other sources. Handouts were produced in Albanian, in standard printed format. Materials and activities were designed to be accessible to participants, with the use of a partner for reading or drawing where necessary. Materials should also have been made available in large print or on cassette tape for visually impaired participants, but for logistical reasons they were not.

Some people on the course felt more comfortable having written information to study (alone or with a partner) at home, or to keep as an *aide memoire*, while others focused solely on what happened during the actual sessions and in their interaction with the other participants. The facilitators tried to strike a balance by providing plenty of handouts, but encouraging people to use them only if they found them helpful to their learning or for their future work.

Transport and funding

Transport is a particular problem for disabled people in Kosovo: many roads are impassable for those who use wheelchairs or crutches, and public transport is inaccessible to them. Long waits for buses and trains, especially in bad weather, the lack of public toilets en route, and the long journey-times, even over short distances, make travelling by public transport an ordeal for everyone. Most disabled people who owned cars before the start of the crisis had long since sold them in order to survive. Consequently, disabled people depended on friends and relatives for lifts every time they needed to go somewhere. Transport costs were therefore built into the budget for this project.

The British Embassy in Belgrade made a generous grant of £5000 to cover most of the costs of the course, and Oxfam supplied the remainder. The most significant

budget line in any training scheme is likely to be staff costs, which should not be regarded (as they often are) as a negative sign of the value of the project.

Logistics and staff time

The DETOT course was held at the Oxfam office in Pristina. In many ways the whole office staff became involved: helping with transport; purchasing materials and refreshments; translating materials; and interpreting during the workshops. Two members of the regular staff acted as co-facilitators, together with an external consultant.

While it is true that the course was a drain on staff resources, there were great benefits for all concerned. Everybody looked forward to Wednesdays, when a large group of people took over part of the office, with all their energy, dynamism, and enthusiasm. In addition, the interaction between Oxfam staff (and other visitors to the office) and the DETOT participants helped to overcome some barriers and increase their understanding of each other.

Results of the DETOT course, and lessons learned from it

Feedback from participants and facilitators, gathered from the final evaluation questionnaire and from evaluation exercises, was very positive and encouraging.

Evaluation by the participants

Participants reported increased confidence in themselves and in their ability to express their feelings and ideas, to use their own experience, and to communicate with others. They felt more independent as a result of their involvement in the course, and reported improvements in their own listening and facilitating skills, and an increased tolerance of others. What they liked most about working as a group was being together often, exchanging opinions and experiences, and learning new things from each other. Sixteen out of the 17 respondents felt that they had been either 'involved' or 'very involved' in the work. The majority felt confident to apply their learning in their work with the LAGs, in workshops (as facilitators), in their everyday lives, and in informal group settings.

They identified the following ways in which they could to put into action their learning from the course:

- Organising and facilitating workshops on disability issues.
- Bringing people together, creating a space where all people have the right to express themselves.
- Working with people on Disability Equality in various contexts, such as with community representatives, at public events, and during home visits.
- Breaking the isolation of disabled people.
- Motivating other disabled people to be more active in the LAGs.
- Sharing information with others, especially about ways of removing barriers to disabled people's participation in society.

- Using their own experiences to support and enable others.
- Influencing public opinion and attitudes about disabled people.
- Using local and foreign examples to teach others about disabled people's rights, abilities, and contributions to society.

Well over the stipulated 50 per cent of participants who were selected to attend the course by their LAGs were disabled. This reflected a growing acceptance by KAPP of the crucial role that disabled people themselves should play in organisations that exist to represent their interests. Likewise, most participants were women, and although still more time was needed for a consideration of the particular needs of disabled women, and for consideration of the inter-relationships between disability and gender, by the end of the course these issues were more firmly and openly on people's own agenda than before, and some participants wanted to take things further by starting a women's group.

On a couple of occasions, when other arrangements broke down, two participants who use wheelchairs challenged physical and attitudinal barriers by taking a two-hour bus journey to and from the training centre, even though it meant being carried on and off the bus and being exposed to the prejudices of other travellers. The course provided a rare opportunity for people from different parts of Kosovo to meet together regularly, share experiences, work together, and get to know each other. Weekly attendance throughout the five months averaged 90–95 per cent, even during the final weeks, when the security situation was deteriorating.

Co-facilitators' evaluation

For the co-facilitators the course was a stimulating, energising experience, and the specific objectives were judged to have been met. Particular highlights included the high degree of interest and motivation shown by participants – passionate discussion of an issue would often continue through lunch and break times – and the evident increase in self-confidence as participants became aware of their own strengths.

The course helped to place disability at the heart of Oxfam's mainstream programme, and the whole staff team moved forwards in terms of their own awareness of, commitment to, and capacity to implement equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities.

At the end of the course, the co-facilitators felt that about eight of the participants could immediately take on the role of workshop facilitator, with some further support and information. All the participants had shown that they were able to apply their learning to their roles within the LAGs and to their own lives. Their suggestions for future actions and plans were creative, relevant to their needs, and realistically achievable.

A particularly significant learning point for facilitators was that, although the course explored the nature of true participation with the group, and included work for small groups and pairs in order to create opportunities for everyone to participate, some individuals tended to dominate whole-group discussions and feedback sessions.

Facilitators eventually realised, however, that when these discussions were allowed to continue for a long time, a natural sequence of contributions seemed to be established, and everyone eventually got a turn to speak. Often the most interesting things were said by those who spoke last, prompting much further comment and discussion. Maintaining a brisk pace was not as important to the group as allowing plenty of time for the expression of ideas. It also helped if each person was encouraged to contribute to general discussions in turn, without interruption, which helped to break the pattern imposed by the dominant speakers.

With the benefit of hindsight, facilitators reported that they would make the following revisions to the course:

- Plan fewer activities each day and allow more time for each topic, so that each could be covered in greater depth.
- Strictly limit the size of the group to 16 people.
- Create more opportunities for participants to practise facilitation, including a period of one or two months in which there were no workshops, during which time participants would design and work on a Disability Equality awareness-raising project in their own communities and then report back on their experiences.
- Move the session on designing workshop activities towards the end of the whole course, rather than include it in the first 'facilitation skills' section, so that all participants would have more experience and ideas with which to work when creating their own activities.
- Define each co-facilitator's role and responsibilities clearly and in writing, before the start of the course.
- From the beginning, introduce the idea of inviting each participant to speak in turn, without interruption, on the subject under discussion, before allowing unmediated general debate.

Facilitators agreed that some important matters were beyond the scope of the DETOT course and would have been better dealt with in a different forum. These topics are identified here for the benefit of readers who might be considering designing a Disability Equality course or a course to train trainers:

- Safe and constructive ways for disabled people to express feelings of anger and frustration; and the role of facilitators in this.
- Dealing with conflicts within groups.
- Personal issues, including sexuality and reproductive rights.
- Discrimination against people with learning difficulties; accessibility of information and self-advocacy for people with learning difficulties.
- Physical and sexual abuse experienced by disabled people.
- The practicalities of inclusive education and employment of disabled people.

Conclusion

The completion of the course was the appropriate time for the expatriate Disability Programme Support Manager (Alison Harris) to depart from the programme. Twenty members of the Kosovo Association of People with Paraplegia (KAPP), most of them disabled, would continue the promotion of Disability Equality within KAPP and the wider community. The DETOT course strengthened the capacity of both individual members and the KAPP as an institution to improve the living conditions of disabled people, working within a clearly articulated framework of human rights and Disability Equality. It is perhaps not unreasonable to believe that when Kosovo subsequently descended into conflict and chaos, the knowledge, skills, and understanding that the participants on the DETOT course had gained (especially from each other) increased their determination and ability to fight for their right – and the right of other disabled people – to survive.