



Introduction

Welcome to the first Learning Update of the Innovation to Inclusion (i2i) programme. Over the coming year, we will be producing regular newsletter-style updates, featuring our latest activities, key learning and steps we are taking to embed new knowledge in ongoing work and share it within the i2i consortium and the wider disability, economic inclusion and inclusive employment sectors.

We hope you enjoy reading it. If you have any feedback on i2i learning, ideas for contributions to future editions, contact Claire Arnott, i2i monitoring and evaluation manager claire.arnott@leonardcheshire.org.



About i2i

i2i is a three-year programme funded by UK aid from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and implemented by a consortium of nine partner organisations, led by pan disability charity Leonard Cheshire. It addresses key challenges facing people with disabilities in accessing economic opportunities and waged employment in Bangladesh and Kenya.

Evidence and learning from i2i will be used to identify and implement, at scale, successful innovative market-based interventions to support people with disabilities in Bangladesh and Kenya and further afield.



Gathering user feedback

People with disabilities reached by i2i have been sharing feedback. Those who took part in focus groups categorically indicated that i2i had, and continues to, change their lives for the better. The programme had not only brought dignity but also new hope and aspirations. They can provide for their families, save part of their income and make investments just like any other individual in society. Others chose to undertake career development by enrolling on courses.

Stakeholders affirm that the i2i career portals eliminate barriers and make job searches easier and faster for people with disabilities

and more reliable for employers to get the right talent. The main challenges employers raised were lack of knowledge of where to find qualified individuals with disabilities and finding suitable talent for the available opportunities.

i2i contributes to the bridging of economic gaps between people with disabilities by promoting inclusive employment where workplaces have inclusive policies, systems and culture that support the recruitment, retention and promotion of all employees with disabilities. There have also been challenges to inclusion at workplaces.

Learning from Consortia Health Check

In December 2020, as part of the wider FCDO-funded research into consortia working, i2i's consortium advisor ran a Health Check on the foundations of the consortium, behaviours, cultures, structures and processes.

It highlighted areas where the consortium is working well together – commitment to change, mutual respect and accountability, gender representation and shared leadership.

It also focused on the programme's weaker areas – clarity on roles and responsibilities, decision making, monitoring, evaluation and learning and knowledge management. Workshops were held for all i2i consortium members to discuss these challenges and brainstorm and identify approaches to resolve them. Action areas were reviewed and responsibility for taking them forward given to individuals and groups.

Internal stakeholders with access to i2i's Sharepoint site can access the Health Check [here](#).

Need for definitions

i2i has work to do to define certain aspects of its logframe.

A key area is thinking through how we define OPD's 'meaningful engagement' in national/global accountability and monitoring processes related to employment and protection policies.

It is not enough to measure their involvement, but also the weight OPD voices are given and their involvement in ongoing conversations.



Another area is company 'endorsements' of inclusive employment. Due to COVID-19 and its impact on economic markets, many businesses have been unwilling to make this kind of commitment in uncertain and challenging times.

Companies can endorse inclusive employment in many different ways, including speaking at events, participating in media activities and posting on social media.

Progress against targets

i2i has coordinated country-level progress against targets sessions, where partners came together to review data and milestones, share learning and identify ways in which they can work together on challenges.

This was an opportunity to review the progress of different programme elements more generally and specifically the milestones for the end of year 2 (March 2021).



Reviewing of assumptions

As a predominantly digital programme, it was initially decided i2i would work with people with disability with an existing level of digital literacy, access to smart phones and internet. But engaging enough of this demographic is a significant challenge – a lot of people, particularly women, have issues with registering on i2i's digital employment platforms or accessing the technology to access them. This raises issues with how we support these individuals and whether additional training is needed or if relevant employment opportunities can be secured.

There will be further collecting and sharing of data to inform programme activities to ensure job matching is possible and people can access the support they need.

Strengthening knowledge management and learning

A recurring theme within i2i is a need for comprehensive knowledge management and a holistic approach to generating and sharing learning, to help consortium partners understand the role they play in the programme, track progress and see what others are doing and learning.

The i2i Learning Update is one new measure to address this. Leonard Cheshire will spearhead an effort to join up existing knowledge management activities by also:

- Creating templates and opportunities for partners to collate and share learning
- Ensuring relevant, up to date documentation is saved on the i2i Sharepoint site and partners are signposted to the right place.
- Encouraging partners to actively use the Sharepoint folder.

Extra cost of disability research

As part of i2i, Leonard Cheshire has carried out extensive research on the extra cost of disability related to employment.

This research has gathered data (qualitative and quantitative) from more than 2,000 people with disabilities and their carers through interviews and focus groups.

The research and its accompanying review of social protection systems in Bangladesh and Kenya has been an engaging and insightful process to plan and develop inclusive social protection systems in both countries and has paved the way for greater policy dialogue between the state, NGOs and the private sector. Key learning includes:

- Underdeveloped social insurance and labour market programmes, not adequately equipped to address challenges of economic inclusion of people with disabilities.
- Existing identification criteria creates a barrier to qualify people with disabilities to access social protection systems and labour market.
- Programmes to promote access of people with disabilities to the labour market are very limited in number and budget.
- Incentives for employers, including tax benefits, for employing people with disabilities and offering reasonable adjustment need to be re-examined.
- People with disabilities usually get minimal or no access to decision-making processes to access education, skills training, health and rehabilitation services and employment, including support from any personal carer.

Mid-Term Review

i2i recently commissioned an independent consultant to conduct a mid-term review. Its purpose was to reflect on progress to date and explore areas where outcomes and impact may be improved in the programme's third and final year.

Specific questions for the review posed by the TOR including assessing:

- To what extent the consortium is fulfilling its commitment to safe, inclusive programming.
- What the consortium has learnt from programme delivery so far.
- What adaptations can be made in its final year to maximise outcomes and impact.

The review understandably considered the difficulties of implementing i2i during a pandemic, recommended pragmatic reflection on whether the gap between current results and targets can reasonably be met and encouraged partners to envision together the programme's legacy after March 2022 and which key elements could be sustainable and replicable by national partners. Recommendations were made around data driven advocacy, an inclusive employment sector, and increasing job opportunities.

We will be working to share the full mid-term review more widely in the coming weeks. So please look out for that.



i2i Learning Conference

The i2i Learning Conference – held online between March 29 and 31 – attracted more than 400 delegates with a shared interest in and commitment to economic inclusion initiatives and innovation in inclusive employment. This included representatives from around the globe from government, civil society, organisations of persons with disabilities, NGOs, international agencies and the private sector. The overall theme of the conference was Innovations for economic inclusion in a digital world.

Across five sessions and a twitter livechat, topics included: influencing and shifting the disability ecosystem, how to support private companies to be disability-inclusive, digital employment platforms, meaningful engagement of OPDs in international cooperation and inclusive social protection systems.

There were speakers from the World Bank, the Government of Bangladesh, the International Labour Organization, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the Federation of Kenya Employers, the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network, CBM UK, Leonard Cheshire, Plan International, the Bangladesh Society for the Change and Advocacy Nexus (B-SCAN), Women Challenged to Challenge, the European Disability Forum, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the Center for Inclusive Policy and United Disabled Persons of Kenya.

Private sector development challenges

i2i's Output 2 has been the most challenging: number of partners involved, COVID-19 and ambitious targets.

Securing businesses' support and endorsements, completing accessibility audits and ensuring firms are posting jobs has been difficult in year 2.

This year will see the consolidation of learning about approaches and ways of working together to ensure progress so far can be maximised.

Coming up

A number of learning activities are coming up, including:

- **The establishment of focus groups to work on implementing key areas of learning.**
- **The creation of learning templates and opportunities for partners to use to collate and share learnings, and**
- **Ongoing work to embed the beneficiary feedback mechanism.**

