

DISABILITY IN PALESTINE: FINDINGS AND NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM EMANCIPATORY RESEARCH

Mario Biggeri*, Federico Ciani^o

*University of Florence; Scientific Director of ARCO (Action Research for Co-Development),
mario.biggeri@unifi.it

^oUniversity of Florence; ARCO (Action Research for Co-Development), federico.ciani@unifi.it

Sommario

Questo articolo presenta i risultati di due ER condotti in Palestina. Questo articolo ha un duplice scopo. Primo, l'introduzione della ER come metodologia basata su processi emancipativi e partecipativi in grado di produrre informazioni di alta qualità. La seconda è l'analisi delle forme di deprivazione delle PcD nella West Bank (Palestina) in termini di accesso a una educazione inclusiva ed efficace. La ER era parte di due progetti implementati dalle ONG AIFO e Educaid in cooperazione con Partner locali. La ER è stata condotta con il supporto del gruppo di ricerca ARCO dell'Università di Firenze.

Abstract

This paper presents the results of two ERs implemented in Palestine. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, to introduce ER as a methodology based on an emancipatory and participatory processes able to produce high quality information. The second is to analyze the deprivation of PwDs in the West Bank (Palestine) in terms of access to inclusive and effective education. The ER was part of two projects implemented by the NGOs Educaid and AIFO with the cooperation of Local DPOs. The ER was implemented with the support of the research group ARCO from the University of Florence.

Keywords:

Disability; Palestine; Emancipatory Research; Participation, Capability

Introduction

The WHO World Report on Disability (2011) indicates that Persons with disabilities (PwDs) account for 15% of world population. The existing body of knowledge on disability in developing countries clearly shows a linkage between disability and poverty and, more in general, between disability and multidimensional deprivation (Mitra, Posarac and Vick, 2013). Palestine is not an exception (Salti et al., 2013) with women with disabilities (WwDs) as one of the most marginalized groups in the society (Burnton, Sayrafi and Srour, 2013). Consequently, PwDs are a group explicitly

targeted by international development cooperation policies. In general, disability is directly addressed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ^I as the inclusion of PwDs in development processes is considered a fundamental part of development itself (Grech, 2016).

The Italian international Development Cooperation with the support of the Italian Network on Disability and Development (RIDS)^{II} developed a specific Action Plan through the participation of scholars, disabled people organizations (DPOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and public institutions. The Action Plan and the relative guidelines were based on a twin track approach that is on the simultaneous investment in disability specific development projects and in the mainstreaming of disability in all the development cooperation activities (MAECI, 2013). The achievement of these objectives starts from inclusive planning of development initiatives and it depends on the availability of exhaustive information and data about the needs of persons with disabilities as well as about environmental factors (i.e. barriers and facilitators). It is worth to underline that, coherently with the SDGs framework, information gathering is a strategic area for the Italian development cooperation to develop policies. In particular, SDG 17 highlights the need of disaggregated data and information to monitor the inclusiveness and the sustainability of development processes in an effective and transparent way. There are different methods to gather information and data (Kanbur and Shaffer, 2007). Emancipatory research (ER) is considered one of the most innovative and inclusive approach to collect information on marginalized groups. The main point of ER is to let the members of marginalized groups to get the full control on the knowledge production process about themselves. In other words, the members of marginalized group (e.g. PwDs) become researchers while the professional researcher become the facilitator of the research process.

In the Palestinian context, the NGO Educaid, in cooperation with RIDS, implemented a set of activities framed in the projects “Particip-Action”^{III} funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation and “*Empowerment of DPOs promoting WWDs’ rights in the West Bank*”^{IV} funded by the European Commission. Both projects can be considered part of a long-term

^I There are 5 SDGs explicitly referred to disability (namely SDG 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17) while “disability” and persons with disabilities are mentioned 11 times in the SDGs

^{II} RIDS is an innovative network formed by 2 NGOs (Educaid and AIFO) and 2 DPOs (DPI-Italia and FISH) with the main objectives of including the knowledge and the skills of relevant DPOs in development cooperation activities and of including PwDs in development projects (both as beneficiaries and as experts), granting them accessibility to the interventions.

^{III} The full title of the project is “Particip-Action: partecipazione attiva e inclusione sociale delle Donne con disabilità in West Bank” (AID10186/Educaid/TOC)

^{IV} ENPI/2014/339-220 : note that the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation was still not operational when the project was implemented. That’s why here we talk about Italian Development Cooperation.

strategy aimed at strengthening the participation of Palestinian PwDs to the society with a strong emphasis on gender and intersectional discrimination.

Among the other activities, Educaid promoted two emancipatory researches involving women with disabilities and members of DPOs to foster empowerment at the individual level, to strengthen local DPOs and to increase the knowledge of disability-related phenomena in Palestine. In the long term, these activities should enable Palestinian PwDs and DPOs to implement an independent monitoring of the implementation of the Palestinian Disability Law (n.4 of 1999), of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In the specific case of these researches, particular attention was paid to the inclusiveness of the education system.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is twofold. The first objective is to introduce ER as a methodology based on an emancipatory and participatory process able to produce high quality information on disability that are useful for the elaboration of policies and the planning of international cooperation activities. The second, but not least relevant aim is to analyze the deprivation of PwDs in the West Bank (Palestine) in terms of access to inclusive and effective education.

All the activities included in the projects have been implemented by Educaid with the cooperation of Local DPOs (Aswat, General Union of Person with Disabilities, Stars of Hope Society) and the Italian Network on Disability and Development. The ER was implemented with the researchers ARCO (Action Research for Co-Development)^V as facilitators and data analysts.

The paper is structured into five sections. After this introduction, the applied theoretical framework is presented framing the analysis in the wider debate on disability and development. Section three introduces the methodology of ER explaining how it was applied in this research. Section four presents the data collected during the field research by providing a description and an interpretation of the results. In the last section, the main findings are recalled and the most relevant implications in terms of policy and design of development interventions on inclusive education are given.

Approaches to Disability, Capability Approach and the UNCRPD

The definitions of and the approaches to disability has been changing over centuries even if different models of disability tend to coexist within the same society (Schianchi, 2012). In general,

^V ARCO is an action-research center affiliated to the University of Florence (Italy)

it is possible to identify an evolution of the definition of disability that shifts the analysis from the impairment and from the a-normality of the PwD to the interaction between the person and the society\environment. In the so called social model of disability, disability is defined as a condition arising from the interaction between the person (with his\her unique characteristics) and the barriers\facilitators present in the society (Basaglia and Ongaro 2000, Oliver 1990 and 1996).

In recent years, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) approved by the UN General Assembly in 2006 provides a new biopsychosocial approach to disability based on the concept of respect of the human rights. In particular, it promotes the full and effective participation in society of every person with or without disability on an equal basis: the physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments should not represent an obstacle to the inclusive and participatory development of individuals and societies.

While moving from the definition of disability to the socio-economic analysis of disability, the Capability Approach (CA) firstly elaborated by the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (Sen 1992, 1999 and 2005) has often been used as theoretical framework (Terzi 2005; Mitra 2006a, 2006b; Nussbaum 2006, Biggeri et al. 2011). Sen's CA has been used as point of reference also to structure empirical analysis and evaluations of policies aimed at improving the wellbeing of PwDs (Biggeri et al. 2014; Mauro, Biggeri and Grilli, 2015).

CA focuses the attention on what a person can do and can be that is, in last instance to his\her practical opportunities and his\her space of freedom. In other words, disability occurs when an individual is deprived in terms of practical opportunities because of an impairment (Mitra 2006a). An individual with an impairment can be considered disabled if he\she has an opportunity set that is smaller than an individual with similar entitlements (i.e. the available basket of goods and services), living in the same context (family, environment, culture) and similar personal characteristics (excluding, of course, the impairment itself).

The role of education is fundamental: it has both an intrinsic and an instrumental value (Nussbaum, 2006, 2011). According to Sen (1992), education can foster public debate and dialogue about social and political arrangements. In this sense, education has a processual role, which enables PwDs to take part in decision-making processes within the household, in the community and even at national level. High quality education acts as an equalizer role through its empowering capacity and its redistributive role. Indeed, education is one of the main facilitators of functioning, through which children, including children with disabilities, are offered the opportunity to enlarge their space of activity and participation and to express their agency. From a cognitive point of view, critical

thinking, caring thinking and narrative imagination are considered logical, moral, and creative components of the higher-order faculties involved in democratic thinking and judgment (Nussbaum, 2006; Biggeri and Santi, 2012). Education has an interpersonal impact because people are able to use the benefits of education to help others as well as themselves and can therefore contribute to democratic freedoms and to the good of society as a whole (see Walker and Unterhalter, 2007). High-quality public education is crucial to the health of democracy (Nussbaum, 2006).

Besides the intuitive and direct linkage to the social model to disability, CA enriches the analysis by stressing the role of individual choices, values and preferences. The vector of achieved functionings should reflect the multiple realizability of the human being and should be the result of a process of flourishing (Nussbaum, 2006). Therefore, the analysis should be simultaneously focused on the achievements of the PwD as well as on the process leading to these achievements throughout individual and social empowerment. In a CA perspective, the active exercise of autonomy and choice (agency) has both an instrumental value (as it allows the person to achieve a functioning) and an intrinsic value.

The flourishing of individuals is shaped by conversion factors that are not only individual but, as in the social model, also collective and environmental. In these circumstances, the CA introduced new concepts and dynamics based on collective capabilities (Ibrahim, 2006) and the functionings of local contexts as a system (Biggeri and Ferrannini, 2014). Collective action and the functionings of the local systems are fundamental means to promote human development both at the individual and at the community level. These developments of the CA are central for an assessment of collective processes and of the degree of inclusiveness of PwDs in a society.

This cultural and intellectual evolution is linked to the practical promotion of rights of PwDs and, in particular to the elaboration of a global standard such as the UNCRPD^{VI}. As already mentioned, the UNCRPD embrace a new bio-psycho-social approach to disability based on human rights. Disability is defined as a condition that is verified when a physical, mental, cognitive or sensory impairment interacting with the context prevent a person from the achievement of a “*full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others*”^{VII}. The emphasis on participation clearly indicates that disability is not defined in terms of weakness and needs of social protection but in terms of human rights: a person prevented to participate to the society by the interaction between his\her characteristics and some forms of barrier is not a person who needs more services

^{VI} Italy approved the CRPD in 2009 while the European Union did it in 2010. Nowadays, the convention has been signed by 187 countries while there are 172 state parties.

^{VII} see CRPD, art.1

but, first of all is a person whose basic human rights are violated (Kayess and French, 2008). This powerful paradigm shift and the strong emphasis on the direct participation of PwDs are reflected in the enforcement mechanisms included in the convention. The UNCRPD establishes a twin track approach to the monitoring of the implementation of the convention where the active involvement of persons with disabilities^{VIII} is directly required (Stein and Lord, 2010). On one hand, the governments of states party engage themselves to periodically report to the Committee of the Rights of Person with Disabilities about the implementation of the UNCRPD. At the same time, the UNCRPD encourages DPOs and more in general civil society organization to put in place an independent monitoring of the Convention that should be delivered to the Committee under the form of “shadow report”.

As DPOs and PwDs participation to the monitoring process is a pivotal component of the UNCRPD structure, methods and procedures to enhance this it are strongly needed.

In the next sections, this paper introduces ER and its application can be applied as a tool to elaborate a truly participatory and high quality independent monitoring of the implementation of the UNCRPD through the direct involvement of PwDs.

Emancipatory Research

ER is an approach to research that falls under the broader category of participatory methods. Participatory methods, strongly popularised in the 1980s with the work of Robert Chambers (Chambers, 1983), led to a complex and wide review of the dominant models of research and fieldwork activities and contributed to cutting-edge understandings in particular for the analysis of social and economic development. Chambers’ original contribution consisted in a vivid critic to the conventional surveys methods, which were characterized by superficial data collection and ethnocentric attitude of the development experts due to their standardized approach and their weak knowledge of the research subjects (Libanora, 2010). Through Chambers’ critical point of view, the academic world began questioning about the mainstream research practices and interventions.

Focusing on participatory research, the intensity of participation changes across methods and approaches. From the mere idea of consulting people and sharing research results in the first forms of participatory approaches, in the 1990s, participation started being perceived as a process through

^{VIII} See art.33.3: “Civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process”.

which the marginalized groups could influence the society and become more aware about their own condition.

ER represents the step forward: those who are involved in a ER process are not only expressing their point of view or facilitating the survey, but they also have the opportunity to gain the full ownership of the whole research process. In the emancipatory approach, through the acquirement of skills and expertise in research conduction, the research subjects lead all the research activities, from the decision of the research strategy to the results dissemination: the professional researchers become only a source of scientific support and a facilitator. This shift of power relations is determinant for the individuals in order to actively become part of the knowledge production and of the decision-making process for policies of their concern.

Through this approach, the marginalized groups of the society acquire specific knowledge for active participation and research implementation, developing awareness on their own social and economic conditions. Through critical discussion and analysis of the research questions, the participants become aware of their rights and of the structural causes of their oppression, elaborating practical solutions in order to improve their living conditions and becoming able to control the process of knowledge production on themselves. The strategy, moreover, has the aim to sensitise and empower communities and institutions, encouraging social transformation and inclusive policies.

The figure of Paulo Freire has significantly inspired the development of emancipatory approaches in development interventions. The action-research methods that he created have been experimented for the first time in the San Paulo's favelas. Starting from the 1960s, the Brazilian educator started to advocate a new critical pedagogy with his innovative theoretical elaboration. While working among the poor and the illiterates in the tough environment of the favelas, Freire began to embrace a non-orthodox form of liberation theology. Through the field experience, he started a process of popular education and awareness raising (that he defined "conscientisation") which during the 1970s has spread throughout Latin America. Starting from this experience, Freire (1968) supported the idea that marginalized people have analytical skills and should be enabled to investigate their own realities and reflect upon their living conditions. . Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal represent then the pioneers of this kind of methodology with their work in the educative domain (Justo, L., & MgSc, F. E., 2005). Similar attention has been devoted to the agency of the poor by the CA through the contribution of scholars that tried to combine participatory methods and Sen's concept of freedom (Frediani, 2010).

The historical development of action research had emancipatory intentions from the very beginning

(Boog, B. W., 2003). Action research and its participatory applications have been designed to improve the researched subjects' capacities to develop skills (including professional skills), improve the problem-solving attitudes, increase their chances of self-determination, and to gain more influence on decision-making processes thanks to a stronger control on knowledge production processes. Emancipation is thou strongly linked to the empowerment processes, as the self-awareness is a key condition for the achievement of equal opportunities and participation in the decision-making mechanisms of the society.

Moving to disability research, Oliver coined the term “*emancipatory disability research*” to refer to a radical new approach to research in the disability field (Oliver, 1992). Since then a big debate started about whether such an approach is a “*realistic goal*” or an “*impossible dream*” (Oliver, 1997). Many factors exclude people with disabilities from the decision-making process related to the policies that affect the quality of their lives. As specified by Barton, “*Research is a social act.*” (Barton, 2005 : 317) and, as such, it involves the interaction among a range of individuals and groups with consequent ethical, procedural and political issues. When it comes to social justice, equity and citizenship, the knowledge production cannot be viewed as neutral, and in the struggle for the inclusion the Academia has to deal with material and ideological barriers that impair a full participation of people with disabilities.

As observed by Barnes, the most important characteristics of the emancipatory disability research are “*the problems of accountability, the role of the social model of disability, the choice of methods, and empowerment, dissemination and outcomes.*” (Barnes, 2003 : 3). In this approach, researchers put their knowledge and know-how at the disposal of PwDs and their organisations through non-hierarchical activities of data collection, analysis and dissemination that weaken the disabling power-relations of the traditional approaches. A pre-condition for the success of an ER process is the full awareness and acceptance by expert researchers of their supporting role (i.e. the limitation of their ego). According to the UNCRPD and the bio-psycho-social approach to disability, the right to be involved in disability research as crucial in order to enhance the quality of the research outcomes (Mercer, 2004).

A ER process is articulated on several steps:

- The identification of a group that will lead the research
- The identification of the research question that emerge from a collective analysis of the barriers on of the mechanism of deprivation

- The definition of a methodology that should be a virtuous compromise between the vision of the research group, the limits in terms of feasibility and the coherence with the research question
- The design of the research tool(s) such as questionnaires, guidelines etc. The research tools should be designed taking into account accessibility issues.
- Data collection that should be based on the highest degree of involvement of the research group
- Data analysis and interpretation of the results
- Dissemination elaborated according to the political vision of the research group

Applying the slogan “*Nothing about us without us*” to the research is a challenging task but the development of an inclusive research culture, in which researchers with and without disabilities can share expertise and cooperate, is essential in the construction of a more accurate knowledge production and a more inclusive society. The emancipatory effect of ER can be identified in a long-term perspective after the research conduction and in a separate manner from the specific research outcomes (Oliver, 1997). The strongest become the political process of collective empowerment, the more it become unacceptable for PwDs and other marginalized groups to tolerate investigatory methods based upon exclusionary relations of research production: to challenge power relations within research processes is a first crucial step to challenge power relation in the society at large.

The Context

Palestine is a peculiar context. Large part of Palestine is still under military occupation and the National Palestinian Authority (NPA) is still very weak and barely able to elaborate and implement coherent policies (including disability related policies). The mobility of persons, goods and services within Palestine and toward the rest of the world is extremely difficult. At the same time, the development of the agricultural sector is made difficult by the political situation itself. Therefore, Palestine is characterised by a weak economy, high unemployment (28.4% in 2016^{IX}) and a heavy dependence on international aid (with an aid/total expenditure ratio around 40%^X).

This critical situation has a deep influence on the conditions of PwDs. According to the last available disability survey about Palestine (PCBS, 2011), disability prevalence is around 2.7%. The data clearly shows that the level of participation of persons with disability to the social and

^{IX} Source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016

^X Source: Palestinian Ministry of Finance, 2011

economic life is very low. The access to job is very low: as a matter of facts 83.7% of Palestinian PwDs was not working at the moment of the interview. Irrespective of the kind of disability, the access to auxiliary devices seem to be a problem for a quite large share of persons with disabilities.

Besides material deprivation, several empirical analyses highlighted a stigmatized perception of disabilities among the Palestinian society leading to discrimination of PwDs in the daily life (Educaid 2014; Burnton, Sayrafi and Srour, 2013). The discrimination against WwDs is even more profound. Most WwDs in Palestinian society remain hidden and silent; their concerns are unknown and their rights are overlooked. They continue to live under the double burden of being person with disabilities and female. Prejudice continues to prevail within each category making women with disabilities one of the most marginalized groups in the society.

The multidimensional deprivation of PwDs is particularly relevant during childhood and access to education is a crucial part of these deprivation dynamics. Access to effective and inclusive education is one of the central points of the UNCRPD: article 24 support the development of inclusive education systems with a central role for individualised support and for the principle of reasonable accommodation. As already mentioned, education has both an instrumental and an intrinsic value: access to education is needed to prepare PwDs to participate to society and to build inclusive societies (art.8 and art.16). The Italian development cooperation is specifically engaged in the promotion of inclusive education given the Italian expertise in this field (MAECI, 2015). Palestine too, through the signature of the UNCRPD and through its inclusive education policy (MOEHE 2015 and 2014), is formally engaged in the promotion access to education of Palestinian PwDs.

Access to education for Palestinian PwDs is still weak and educational outcomes are generally poor (Jones et al., 2016). The enrolment rate for students with disabilities (SwDs) is still significantly lower than the general one with more than one third of disabled people aged 15 and older have never enrolled in school (PCBS, 2011). Dropout rates are extremely high too (PCBS, 2011). Empirical analyses focused on the identification of barriers found that transportation, attitudes, accessibility of learning activities substantially prevent Palestinian SwDs from having effective access to education. Zaqout and Abu-Hamad (2013) underlined the role played by several barriers including both material (transport, economic resources) and non-material ones (aptitudes).

This framework interacts with the political situation whose consequences tend to hit SwDs more than proportionally. In general, the prevalence of post-traumatic stress among Palestinian students is high (up to 33% according to PCBS 2014).

Jones et al. (2016) underline that the lack of monitoring of the effectiveness of the inclusion of Palestinian children with disabilities is one of the most urgent problems. This paper will show how the direct participation of PwDs and of DPOs can contribute (through ER) to establish a monitoring and evaluation system of the inclusiveness of the Palestinian education system.

Two ERs, mixed methods: data collection and results

The analysis of these issues has been deepened through two ERs which were conducted in the West Bank from September 2015 to October 2016.

The two ERs collected the information via a mixed methods approach. The implemented mixed method strategy was based on the use of qualitative methods to elaborate the research tools, on the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data and, finally, on the use of qualitative methods to deepen the interpretation of the results.

The first ER was a research based on the involvement of board members of 11 Palestinian DPOs^{XI}. The participants to the ER process collected quantitative information about 100 schools with the objective of evaluating their degree of accessibility. The survey covered 7 governorates in the West Bank^{XII}. These quantitative data have been combined with the qualitative data collected during the second ER. The second group of researchers was composed by WwD and the researchers implemented 3 focus groups with different selected targets, 16 life course interviews and 6 interviews to teachers with a strong experience concerning education of children with disabilities. In both researches, the two research groups were in charge for all the steps including data collection and data entry.

The development of the methodology and the interpretation of the results was based on a set of focus group discussions with the research groups facilitated by ARCO researchers, Educaid staff and Birzeit University. The information was collected by interviewing school staff members.

The quantitative survey covered elementary, intermediate and high schools including both mainstream schools and schools for SwDs. The questionnaire was structured in several sections so that each section corresponds to a dimension of inclusive education. The identified dimensions are:

^{XI} GUPwD Hebron, GUPwD Bethlehem, GUPwD Ramallah, Stars of Hope, Rantis, Thalassemia, Friends of Disabled, Aswat, Deaf Union, Women and Society Center, Al Baseera

^{XII} Salfit, Nablus, Bethlehem, Jenin, Ramallah, Qualkirya, Hebron

- environmental accessibility that is the possibility to reach, enter and move comfortably within the school;
- accessibility of learning activities (including the availability learning tools);
- inclusiveness of interpersonal relations within the school (relations with teachers and with peers).

5.1. Main results and discussion

The first step needed to have an accessible school system is the possibility to reach the schools. The relevance of this aspect is twofold. First, the choice of the kind of school is directly linked to ability to structure one’s project of life. Moreover, the ease to reach the school provides an indicator of the inclusiveness of the society as it is directly linked to the accessibility of public transport etc. The interviewees were asked to describe how SwDs could daily reach the school if they live 10km far (i.e. a distance that cannot be easily covered by walking). Barriers seem to be particularly severe for student with mobility and mental\cognitive impairment. More often, the school can be reached only through private transport (taxi or private car). This kind of solution represents an implicit economic barrier.

Tab 1- How easy is to reach the school for a student living 10 km far from the school

	Kind of transportation		
	Impossible (%)	Only private transport (%)	Public transport (%)
Student who use a wheelchair	19	73	8
Student with visual impairment	10	67	23
Student with hearing impairment	5	47	48
Student with cognitive mental impairment	25	54	21

As concerns the possibility to get into the school, the entrance of 37% of the sampled schools is not accessible at all for students who are wheelchairs users while the entrance of only very few schools (10%) has environmental adaptation to favour the movement of students with visual disabilities. The problems of students who are wheelchair users are not limited to the entrance of the school. In fact, in only 6 schools out of 100 all the floors are accessible for students with a mobility

impairment. Toilets are effectively accessible only in 36% of sampled schools^{XIII}. Very few schools (4%) have environmental adaptations to facilitate the movements of students with visual disabilities.

On the whole, the lack of environmental accessibility in the most part of the mainstream schools creates a huge challenge for the child and his family, that sometimes are forced to address their needs to special schools which are very few in the Palestinian territories.

In special schools, the interaction among the students is healthy and based on mutual respect, and of course it depends on the students' personality. The mainstream schools should become more inclusive: for a blind child, for example, it is important to attend school in the neighbourhood, in order to avoid the unfamiliarity of the surrounding space and environment. (T.INT-ELEMENTARY-SPECIAL)

Safety procedures for student with disabilities in case of emergency are planned only in 8 schools out of 100. This is a critical point in particular in Palestine where the political situation makes the probability of emergency evacuation of schools and other public buildings is much higher than in other contexts (Affouneh, 2008).

The different needs of student with different impairments should be addressed by the education system by providing appropriate learning tools and strategies aimed at giving the right value to the resources and the potentialities of each students independently from his\her impairments. On this regard, the situation is characterized by clear criticalities. Only a minority of the schools (26 out of 100) is able to offer appropriate learning tools (e.g. books in braille or audiobooks) to students with visual disabilities. The situation for students with hearing disabilities is even more critical. Only very few schools provide an appropriate support (14%) while only 12% has at least one staff member who is able to speak sign language. The situation of students with mental and cognitive disabilities is characterized by an overall disappointing performance of the sampled schools. First of all, segregation is de facto practiced in almost one school out of two as students with mental and cognitive disabilities do not share at all the same classrooms with other students. This kind of situations witnessed by the personal experience of interviewees:

I didn't like my school; I always ran away from school. I didn't feel accepted, the teacher used to get me out of class to clean the school yard and help our cleaning lady, or even clean the school's bathrooms. That's why I used to run away from school or hide on the school's roof hoping that the teachers and the principal wouldn't see me. (LCI-17-F-

^{XIII} During the discussion, several DPOs underlined that in several school the accessible toilets are often out of order or are frequently used for storage so that they are useless for SwDs.

MENT).

Only 48% of the school provide personalized support for these students even if this support is often provided only for a part of the time spent at school. Only a minority of the schools is able to provide a resource room to foster the use of students with mental and cognitive disabilities (17%). The most worrying datum is the one about the elaboration of personalized learning plans. Only 12 schools out of 100 base their activities with students with mental and cognitive impairments on a global strategy elaborated by all the teachers involved in the education of the student. In other words, even the schools that are able to provide some kind of service often do not do it in the wider framework of a plan aimed at increasing and giving value to the capacities of the student.

During the elaboration of the questionnaire, the DPOs representatives underlined the need of collecting information about the participation of the students to all the activities organized in the school. Therefore, the accessibility of art classes, of computer rooms as well as to extracurricular activities (e.g. schooltrips, open days) is crucial to achieve an effective inclusiveness of the school system.

The collected information shows a not sufficient degree of inclusiveness of these activities in particular for students with visual disabilities and with mental or cognitive impairment while the opportunity to participate of students with hearing and mobility impairments is substantially higher. This difference is mainly due to the intrinsic characteristic of the impairments and not to the presence of a better support for students with a certain kind of impairment.

Tab 2- Accessibility of activities in the school

	Students having access to...		
	Art classes (%)	Computer room (%)	Extra-curricular activities (%)
Student with a mobility impairment	69	63	61
Student with visual impairment	32	28	61
Student with hearing impairment	72	69	81
Student with cognitive mental impairment	41	23	49

The quality of inter-personal relations within the education process is crucial both for educational achievements and as a component of education inclusiveness. The onset of a disability challenges the relational network of the person:

I had a good relations with my friends, I visited them and did many activities together but after I had the accident they didn't contact me, so I was forced to make new friends. When I returned to school, it was difficult at the beginning, my mates didn't communicate with me. It took some time but later on they accepted me and also my teacher encouraged me to study hard. (LCI-28-F-VISUAL).

If the child has the chance to experience an inclusive and accessible atmosphere in school, the experience in education will have a positive impact on his psychological balance, on his social interactions and on the employment opportunities as well.

I was really happy when I was at school, I was a good student; I used to study hard, I was never late to school and I used to wake up early and with full energy. I also loved my friends from school, and I am still in touch with some of them. I had a good relationship with my teachers, I used to hate weekends and holidays, because I knew I wouldn't see my teachers and my schoolmates. At that time I also took part to many extracurricular activities, and I really loved sport (LCI-45-F-MENTAL).

According to survey data, the behaviour of teachers toward SwDs is usually appropriate. What emerge from the survey is a widespread presence of “good will” teachers even if, at least to a certain extent, 74% of the teachers tend to perceive the presence of SwDs as a problem.

Tab 3- Teachers' attitudes toward disability

	Almost always true	Usually true	Occasionally true	Usually Not true	Almost Never true
Teachers shows empathy toward SwDs	41	46	10	1	2
Teachers try to do their best	32	33	29	5	1
Teachers are aware that education is a right for SwDs	56	31	8	4	1
Teachers do not pay enough attention to SwDs	2	12	18	41	26
Teachers tend to perceive the presence of SwDs as a problem	10	15	24	26	25
School managers are sensitive toward SwDs' needs	24	19	18	25	14

The perceived global ability of schools to provide an inclusive education presents the same kind of criticalities. The education provided by the schools can be defined more or less inclusive for student with mobility impairment in 60% of cases, for student with visual impairment in 45% of cases, for students with hearing impairments in 49% of cases. The case of student with mental and cognitive disabilities is totally different: only 20% of schools are able to provide a more or less inclusive education while in 48% of cases the education provided is defined as not inclusive at all. The results from life course interviews are coherent with this framework:

When I went to school, I felt that I was left behind, the teachers didn't accept me, so they didn't make any effort to let me participate in class or to explain me the things I couldn't understand. I felt that I was different than the others: many other children didn't want to play with me and they even used to make fun of me. The school has not been cooperative with my disability, the principal used to call my mom every day and to complain about me. Fortunately, my mother decided to take me out of that school. (LCI-17-F-MENT).

The relation with peers is not devoid of criticalities. In 58% of cases the interviewees report the more or less common presence of dynamics of discrimination of SwDs. In 38% episodes of violence are reported by the interviewees.

Despite this not totally negative picture, the interviewees reported that only 20% of the schools have more than 2 teachers appropriately trained to deal with SwDs while in 1 school out of 4 there are no support teachers at all. In practice in 80% of the schools less than 10% of teachers received a training on disability. The training of teachers seems to be a priority. It is interesting to remember that, in last instance, teachers are the medium of all the improvements that can be introduced in the education system. As emerged in the following interview, the behaviour of teachers can create dynamics of exclusion and segregation that are not justified by the absence of assistive devices or by not adequate infrastructures but by the lack of a human rights based approach to disability:

The situation worsened because of my hearing disability. I preferred to sit in the first rows to hear better the teacher but, as I am tall, the teacher moved me back. This prevented me to follow the lectures as the others (LCI-18-M-HEAR).

Moreover, considering last three years 68% (73% if we consider project promoted by the Palestinian Ministry of Education) of sampled schools didn't participate to any structured project concerning disability. Finally, only 23% of the schools established a special unit on disability to coordinate and

monitor current the activities and elaborate a strategy for the future. In other words, the ability of the school to include SwDs is largely left to the “good will” of staff members without providing nor appropriate training, nor appropriate planning, nor appropriate infrastructure. In this situation, to move away from an approach to disability based on charity to arrive to an approach based on human rights and on the bio-psycho-social model proposed by UNCRPD seems to be difficult.

Conclusion

The paper shows the potentialities of ER as instrument to get high quality information about disability and, in particular, as an instrument for policy design and evaluation with a focus on education and having Palestine and in particular the West Bank as an interesting case study

All in all, the two research groups were able to collect high quality information. Their involvement in the elaboration of the research tools and in the analysis of the collected data can be considered as a crucial source of added value for the overall design and implementation of the research. The main results (reported in the next paragraphs) presents interesting information potentially useful to plan future interventions as well as to monitor the implementation of the CRPD and of Palestinian disability-related laws. The increased capacity of the PwDs and of the DPOs involve in the two ERs is a crucial achievement and a chance of individual and collective empowerment.

The collected information can be considered a good starting point to analyze the inclusiveness of the Palestinian education system for SwDs. The overall picture identifies the lack of investments aimed at increasing the quantity and improving the quality of the available human resources (i.e. teachers and other staff members). Most of schools seems to lack of a vision of how to reach the highest possible level of inclusiveness: the lack of a special unit on disability and of personalized learning plans in the large majority of schools is a clear indicator of an approach to disability largely based on improvisation and on good will rather than on planning.

The lack of infrastructure aimed at fostering the participation of students with disabilities is another problem stressed that emerge from the data analysis. The overall endowment of accessible rooms and learning tools as well as of basic services (including toilets) is not sufficient at all. Anyway, the investments in this sense should be framed in strategy as to improve material infrastructure without a clear improvement in the quality of human resources is likely to decrease the effectiveness of the investments themselves.

The results point out the role played by the context: the education system is of course the pivotal component of the right to education but factors as the role of the family, the transport network etc. emerged as possible barriers to the development of an inclusive education for Palestinian SwDs. In this sense, the issue of right to education for student with disabilities should be addressed through an eco-systemic approach able to identify and involve all the relevant institutions in a multilevel governance framework.

The Hamletic doubt of the Palestinian education system concerns the short-term feasibility of an inclusive education compared to investments in “good” special education. Several experts seem to push toward the second option (Jones et al., 2017) suggesting that inclusive education is not an achievable goal in the short term. Therefore, these analyses suggest to invest in special education while preparing the ground for inclusive education through ad hoc actions. Our analysis tends to reverse the perspective: the data shows that the priority and preliminary challenge is to induce a cultural change. The presence of SwDs in mainstream schools is an engine of change as it creates the need of achieving change to meet real and actual needs. Joining the presence of SwDs with the independent monitoring of DPOs, it will be possible to furtherly strengthen the change process.

The research is not devoid of limits: the limited availability of time and resources and the concurrence between data collection and the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan had a direct impact on the number of interviews collected by the research groups as well as on the sampling strategy. The research design can be improved increasing the coverage of the data collection and expanding the ER to other fields.

References

- Affouneh S. (2008). “Education Under Occupation: Listening to Girls' Stories”. Ramallah: Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Center.
- Barnes C. (2003) “What a difference a decade makes: reflections on doing ‘emancipatory’ disability research.”, *Disability & Society*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 3-17.
- Barton L. (2005) “Emancipatory research and disabled people: Some observations and questions.”, *Institute of Education, University of London*, Vol. 57 No. 3, pp. 317-327.
- Biggeri M., Bellanca N., Bonfanti S. and Tanzj L.(2011),“Rethinking Policies for Persons with Disabilities through the Capability Approach: the Case of The Tuscany Region”, *ALTER - European Journal of Disability Research*, Vol 5, No 3, pp. 177-191.
- Biggeri M., Deepak S., Mauro V., Trani J. F., Kumar J., and Ramasamy, P. (2014), “Do community-based rehabilitation programmes promote the participation of persons with

- disabilities? A case control study from Mandya District, in India.”, *Disability and rehabilitation*, Vol. 36, No 18, pp. 1508-1517.
- Biggeri M. and Ferrannini A. (2014). *Sustainable Human Development: A New Territorial and People-centred Perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, London.
- Biggeri M. & Santi M. (2012), “The Missing Dimensions of Children's Well-being and Well-becoming in Education Systems: Capabilities and Philosophy for Children”, *Journal of human development and capabilities*, Vol 13, No 3, pp. 373-395.
- Boog B. W. (2003), “The emancipatory character of action research, its history and the present state of the art.”, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 6, pp. 426-438.
- Burton G., Sayrafi I. and Srour, S. A. (2013), “Inclusion or transformation? An early assessment of an empowerment project for disabled people in occupied Palestine.”, *Disability & Society*, Vol 28, No 6, pp. 812-825.
- Chambers R. (1983), *Rural development: putting the last first*, Prentice Hall, Harlow.
- Educaid (2014) “Particip-Action Baseline Survey (AID10186/Educaid/TOC)”, Beith Sahour: Educaid
- Freire P. (1996), *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Penguin Books, London.
- Frediani A. A. (2010), “Sen's Capability Approach as a framework to the practice of development.”, *Development in practice*, Vol 20, No 2, pp. 173-187.
- Grech S. (2016). “Disability and development: Critical connections, gaps and contradictions”, in Grech, S. and Soldatic, K. (ed) “Disability in the Global South”, Springer International Publishing, Cham.
- Ibrahim S. S. (2006), “From individual to collective capabilities: the capability approach as a conceptual framework for self- help”, *Journal of Human Development*, Vol 7, No 3, pp.397-416.
- Jones N, Bassam Abu Hamad, Kifah Odeh, Paola Pereznieto, Ola Abu Al Ghaib, Georgia Plank, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Mohammed Shaheen (2016). *Every child counts: understanding the needs and perspectives of children with disabilities in the State of Palestine*, UNICEF, Jerusalem.
- Justo L. and MgSc F. E. (2005), *In a marginal voice. From participatory to emancipatory research*, Escuela de Medicina and Facultad de Humanidades Universidad Nacional del Comahue, Buenos Aires.
- Kayess R., and French P. (2008), “Out of darkness into light? Introducing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, *Human rights law review*, Vol 8, No 1, pp. 1-34.
- Kanbur R. and Shaffer P. (2007), “Epistemology, normative theory and poverty analysis: implications for Q-squared in practice”, *World Development*, Vol 35, No 2, pp. 183-196.

- Libanora R. (2010). "Partecipazione e cooperazione internazionale: per uno sviluppo "dal basso"?", in Biggeri M. e Canitano G. (ed.), "Temi avanzati di economia e politica della cooperazione internazionale allo sviluppo", F. Angeli, Milano.
- Mauro V., Biggeri M. & Grilli L. (2015), "Does Community-Based Rehabilitation Enhance the Multidimensional Well-Being of Deprived Persons With Disabilities? A Multilevel Impact Evaluation", World Development, Vol 76, pp. 190-202.
- Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI) (2015), Inclusive education for persons with disabilities, MAECI Publications, Roma.
- Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (MAECI) (2013), Piano di azione sulla disabilità della cooperazione Italiana, MAECI Publications, Roma.
- Mercer G. (2004). "From critique to practice: Emancipatory disability research.", in Barnes, C. and Mercer, G. (ed.) "Implementing the social model of disability: Theory and research", The Disability Press, Leeds.
- Mitra S., Posarac A. and Vick B. (2013), "Disability and poverty in developing countries: a multidimensional study", World Development, vol.41, pp. 1-18.
- Mitra S. (2006a), "The Capability Approach and Disability", Journal of Disability Policy Studies, Vol 16, No 4, pp. 236-247.
- Mitra S. (2006b), "Disability and social safety nets in developing countries", International Journal of Disability Studies, Vol 2, No1, pp. 43-88.
- MOEHE -Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2014), Education Development Strategic Plan 2014–19, MOEHE, Ramallah.
- MOEHE -Ministry of Education and Higher Education (2014), Palestinian Inclusive Education Policy, MOEHE, Ramallah.
- Nussbaum M. C. (2011), Creating capabilities, Harvard University Press, Harvard.
- Nussbaum M. (2006), Frontiers of Justice: disability, nationality, species membership, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge
- Oliver M. (1990), Politics of Disablement, Macmillan, London.
- Oliver M. (1996), Understanding disability. From theory to practice. Basigstoke, New York.
- Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and Ministry of Social Affairs (2011), Press conference report, Disability Survey, Ramallah: Palestine.
- Salti N., Nuwayri-Salti N. and Ghattas H. (2013), "Disability and food insufficiency in the Palestinian refugee population in Lebanon: a household survey", The Lancet, Vol 382, No S31.
- Schianchi M. (2012), Storia della disabilità. Dal castigo degli dei alla crisi del welfare, Carocci Editore, Roma.
- Sen A. (1992), Inequality Reexamined, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sen A. (1999), Development As Freedom, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

- Sen A. (2005), "Human Rights and Capabilities", *Journal of Human Development*, Vol 6, No. 2, pp. 151-166.
- Stein M. A., and Lord J. E. (2010), "Monitoring the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: innovations, lost opportunities, and future potential", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol 32, No 3, pp. 689-728.
- Terzi L. (2005), "Beyond the Dilemma of Difference: The Capability Approach to Disability and Special Educational Needs", *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol 39, No 3, pp. 443-459.
- Walker M., and Unterhalter E. (2007) "The capability approach: Its potential for work in education", in Amartya Sen's capability approach and social justice in education (pp. 1-18). Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Zaqout B. and Abu-Hamad B. (2013), *Quality of care provided to PWDs in Gaza: Clients' perspectives*, LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, Saarbrücken.

List of Acronyms

ARCO	Action Research for Co-Development
CA	Capability Approach
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
DPO	Disabled People Organisation
ER	Emancipatory Research
GUPwD	General Union of Persons with Disabilities
MAECI	Ministero degli Affari Esteri e Cooperazione Internazionale
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ONG	Organizzazione Non Governativa
PcD	Persona con Disabilità
PwD	Person with Disabilities
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
RIDS	Rete Italiana Disabilità e Sviluppo
SwD	Student with Disability
WHO	World Health Organization
WwD	Woman with Disabilities