Future Opportunities

Based on the trends identified a number of future directions could be considered. The partnership model characterizing past initiatives seems to provide an effective model for pursuing future directions. Who the partners are, though, is an important issue. They can't be arbitrarily chosen or unduly influenced by particular governments or funders. The partnerships as described above were based on a common mission, a joint decision-making process and open communication between all partners. The integrity of the partners to be accountable to their own constituencies was extremely important. *Given that such conditions are in place, the support for a partnership approach to pursuit of international disability issues is an important principle to be promoted in the future.*

Another important issue is the financial and political support needed by disability organizations in Canada to pursue a role internationally. Canadian disability organizations, while interested in issues of colleagues in other countries, rarely are funded at a level where international work is feasible. Further, there always are domestic pressures which raise the question whether international work should be a priority. There also is the legitimate question whether the best approach is for Canadian disability organizations should themselves work abroad, or whether the best approach would be to seek to influence those organizations with extensive international development experience to include disability within their mandates. Both approaches have merit, and there is an argument to be made that both need to be pursued. Whichever approach is adopted, the absence of financial and political support places severe constraints on all. In the mid-1980s a study of future options for Canadians was undertaken by Human Resources Development Canada, and approaches in other countries were examined. International aid agencies in Britain, Australia and several other countries provided significant support for the voluntary sectors to bid on international contracts and to play an important role within UN systems. A similar approach has never been identified as a clear policy option within Canada. *Given the demonstration that Canadians have been able to make a tremendous impact internationally in the disability field, and continue to do so, it is important for Canadians in government to find ways to support disability organizations more directly in the future.*

A third issue to examine is the philosophical framework and paradigm that has been promoted by Canadians internationally. Our review of the past half-century gives strong evidence that the approaches that have had the greatest impact have been those which pursued the inclusion of disabled people as full citizens within their countries, modeling change which promoted human rights and empowerment and the building of grassroots initiatives. This has involved partnerships between advocacy groups along with a variety of others including universities and government. Where Canada has promoted traditional medical and rehabilitation approaches the impact has been more limited. Indeed, there are examples where millions of dollars have been spent on traditional medical and rehabilitation approaches with little apparent effect. There has also been some real struggle and limitation in recognizing the value of this direction as it has often come from marginalized groups that have had limited funding and resources. Within the Mines Action Initiative the disability initiative took on more of a traditional service orientation rather than a human rights approach. *The implication is that government policy and financial aid would do best if it recognized the importance of supporting the philosophical direction of engaging grassroots groups that has been developed by Canadians.*

A final area to examine is the influence of Canadians on modeling change. New models have been developed through the independent living movement, the community living movement, the advocacy organizations, new transformative education models as reflected in disability studies