

NEWSLETTER

I. Update from Project Director

This year, as we celebrate the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we are proud to present the third edition of the ENGAGE newsletter. This edition highlights the growth in knowledge, experiences, and praxis demonstrated by young women and girls with disabilities in India, Vietnam, and South Africa over the past three years. As we enter the final year of this project, we aim to share critical insights, initiatives, and practices that participants in each site have developed through their engagement in different aspects of the project. While each local research team takes unique steps toward mobilizing project outcomes with relevant stakeholders and communities, we reaffirm the importance of sustaining our commitment to learning with and from diverse contexts, people, and communities across the Global South as part of our shared journey.

This journey would not have been possible without the dedication and support of ENGAGE partners, researchers, stakeholders, community members, and, most importantly, the young women and girls with disabilities in the three project sites. As reflected in the updates below, these young women and girls have shown that they can actively contribute to knowledge creation with their peers, networks, and communities. Their efforts underscore a decolonial and transformative approach to leadership and activism, challenging traditional narratives and paving the way for inclusive change.

Additionally, we are excited to share research outcomes from related initiatives, such as the Engendering Disability-Inclusive Development (EDID) project focusing on the Vietnam case study, along with updates on partners' activities and knowledge mobilization efforts. By expanding our learning networks, we ensure that each step we take contributes to creating decolonial spaces for knowledge production and collective activism, fostering the potential for social transformation in marginalized communities across the Global South.

Happy International Day of Persons with Disabilities!

In solidarity,
Xuan Thuy Nguyen
Associate Professor and ENGAGE's project director
Decolonial Disability Studies Collective (DDSC)



A traditional dance performance by A Luoi Women and Girls with Disabilities Club, Vietnam.



Presentation of 'What we want?' for creation of the manifesto, India.

The Decolonial Disability Studies Collective (DDSC),

led by Dr. Xuan Thuy Nguyen from Carleton University, comprises a group of disabled and nondisabled researchers and activists from both the global south and the global north. The DDSC currently has four ongoing projects – including the ENGAGE project – each of which seeks to centre the knowledges and experiences of people with disabilities from the Global South, while creating new forms of collective learning, engagement, and transformation.

II. Update from our local partners

2.1. VIETNAM

Written By: Nhi Truong

May 2024 Fieldwork

The final local fieldwork in Vietnam, held from May 16 to 19, 2024, focused on leadership development for women and girls with disabilities and fostering community engagement. In preparation, the research team collaborated with the youth leadership group members to design meaningful activities. As part of this effort, the youth leadership group proposed several girl-centered initiatives to enhance participation, the shared sense of responsibility, and the leadership roles of the girls and young women involved.



A girl with disabilities worked on her leadership reflection.



Young women and girls presented their knowledge mobilization plan.

The girls also played active roles as facilitators, coordinating a cellphilm activity titled “Envisioning the Leadership Role of Girls with Disabilities”. Throughout this activity, they were very enthusiastic and demonstrated their group coordination and facilitation skills, and they remained true to the group’s key ideas when presenting and answering discussion questions. Additionally, the participants facilitated the “Discussion Forum with Community stakeholders,” in which they introduced exhibition pieces and themes, shared personal stories, and proposed the establishment of a club for women and girls with disabilities.

Overall, the final workshop enhanced participants’ knowledge about leadership as a form of activism by using creative forms of mobilization, such as creating short films and using technologies to mobilize their voices. It showed that participants could use these tools to raise awareness within their community and it demonstrated their willingness to share their opinions and engage in dialogue with stakeholders, viewing it as an opportunity to voice their concerns.

2.1. VIETNAM

Written By: Nhi Truong

Launch of the Women and Girls with Disabilities Club under the ENGAGE Project in A Lưới, Vietnam

On October 11, 2024, women and girls with disabilities in A Lưới successfully launched their official club with over 30 members, marking a significant milestone for the ENGAGE project. The A Lưới Women and Girls with Disabilities Club is the result of the continuous efforts of women and girls with disabilities, along with close collaboration with community stakeholders and local authorities. The club was established with the objectives of creating a safe space for women and girls with disabilities to connect and support each other, promoting their rights and active participation in community activities, and raising awareness within the community about the rights of people with disabilities and the specific challenges faced by women and girls with disabilities.



The Chairwoman of the Women and Girls with Disabilities Club presents the report on membership mobilization efforts and introduces the club's activity plan.



Members of the Women and Girls with Disabilities Club introduce and explain the meaning of their artwork.

The Launch Ceremony was attended by representatives from various local organizations and authorities, including the A Lưới District Fatherland Front, Women's Union, Disabled People's Association, Association for the Blind, and other social organizations, highlighting their interest and support for the establishment of the club.

Under the leadership of the youth leadership team, members worked closely with the ENGAGE project researcher, the A Lưới District Association for the Blind, local authorities, and community organizations to ensure all procedures complied with regulations. Additionally, they consulted experts from the Action to the Community Development Institute (ACDC) organization and gained insights from other clubs through online meetings. The youth leadership team showcased significant growth in their leadership and organizational skills, earning recognition from the community for their efforts.

The establishment of the club marks an important step in promoting the rights and creating development opportunities for women and girls with disabilities in A Lưới. We hope the club will continue to play a key role and engage in meaningful activities in the future.

2.2. INDIA

Written By: Suchandra Bhadrui



Discussions held in August 2024 Workshop for identifying and captioning images for 'photo-voice'.

August and October 2024 Fieldworks

This year, two residential workshops were held for the ENGAGE Project to explore how girls and women with disabilities in India view themselves as leaders and agents of change. The August 2024 workshop spanned 2 days (the 16th and 17th) and focused on revisiting the 'photo-voice' exercise where participants used photography to raise awareness around accessibility issues within their community. This exercise built upon our previous workshop, where discussions centered around disability, leadership and the unique role of girls and women with disabilities as leaders. The workshop also provided an opportunity to deepen the participants' understanding of key community stakeholders and their role in championing accessibility and inclusion. These hands-on sessions not only amplified the voices of girls and women with disabilities but also enhanced their skills for community engagement and strengthened their leadership skills. In line with the ongoing focus on leadership development, participants engaged in interactive games designed to enhance critical thinking and broaden their perspectives. Activities like 'What's in the Box', where participants guessed by touch, brought plenty of laughter and joy, while 'Talk me through It' required participants to describe images without naming specific objects in it, challenging their communication skills and revealing diverse perspectives. The use of sign language made this game even more interesting.

On October 22nd and 23rd, we reconvened to bring our August discussions to life through a collaborative session, bouncing ideas for and finally creating a disabled girls and women's manifesto. Drawing inspiration from the Youth Leadership Circle (YLC) in Vietnam, our YLC leaders facilitated a session on manifesto creation. The goal is to foster a network of young girls and women leaders with disabilities in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal, India. Participants highlighted the need to address issues of rights violation, domestic violence, access to government pensions and other services in their discussions, marking an important step towards building a unified voice for disability advocacy in the region. Guided by key questions – "Who are we?", "What do we want?", "What are we committed to?", and "What steps will lead us to our goals?"—participants explored their shared identities, aspirations, and the vision for a more inclusive community and building a network of their own. This process enabled girls and women with disabilities to articulate their dreams and chart actionable steps toward those goals. The workshop concluded with an exciting commitment: the creation of a dedicated club for girls and women with disabilities, paving the way for future collective action and support.

2.3. SOUTH AFRICA

Written By: Lerato Jiyane

Empowering the Future: The ENGAGE Project Supporting Girls with Disabilities Nears Completion

Through the ENGAGE project, Blind SA on behalf of the South African Disability Alliance and in partnership with the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Carleton University, Zululand Mental Health Society, Disabled People South Africa and SA Visions have gained invaluable opportunities for growth, activism, leadership, and empowerment, igniting much hope for the future .

The culmination of these efforts will be marked by the final workshop in late 2024, which will take place in Empangeni, KwaZulu-Natal from the 19th - 21st of November 2024. It is an event that promises to be both a celebration of the progress made and a powerful reminder of the work that still needs to be done. During this workshop, participants will have the chance to showcase their skills, share their experiences, and inspire others in their communities. These girls are not just learning new skills—they are learning to see themselves as powerful agents of change in their own lives and in their communities.

“This project has been a testament to what can be achieved when we come together to support the most vulnerable in our societies. We are not just creating opportunities for girls with disabilities—we are changing the narrative for generations to come. - Thandile Butana - a Community Programme Liaison officer at Blind SA”

While the final workshop will mark the end of this phase, the legacy of the project will continue to reverberate throughout these communities for years to come. The network of teachers, mentors, and local organizations that have been developed over the past three years will ensure that the support for these girls does not end here. In fact, the lessons learned through this project will lay the groundwork for the expansion of similar initiatives in other regions, proving that when countries collaborate with a common goal, they can make a significant, lasting impact on the lives of some of the world’s most marginalized children.

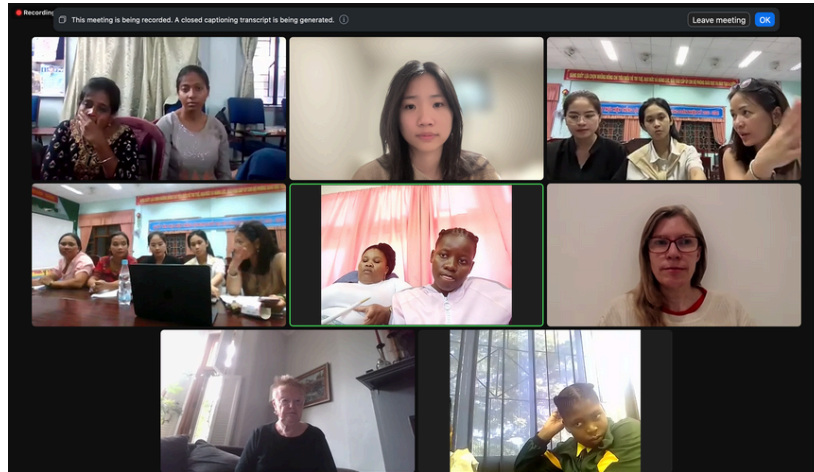


Girls with disabilities in South Africa performed a dance with the national flags of Vietnam and India to the song “Flashlight”.

III. OTHER NEWS

Written By: Linh Dang

3.1. Youth Leadership Circle (YLC) Meetings



A screenshot of our YLC February virtual meeting, including participants and their support persons, Dr. Thuy Nguyen, Dr. Claudia Mitchell and research assistants.

Throughout the year, representatives from South Africa, India, and Vietnam participated in three virtual YLC meetings held in February, May, and November. They came together to share community updates, strategize for the final stage of the ENGAGE project, and plan for the next steps following its conclusion.

3.2. ENGAGE Research Meeting



A screenshot of our ENGAGE research stream, Dr. Claudia Mitchell, Linh Dang, Dana Corfield, Dr. Thuy Nguyen, Hoa Bui, Dr. Mayurika Chakravorty, Nhi Truong, Suchandra Bhadruj, and Dr. Nandini Ghosh.

On August 13, 2024, the ENGAGE research stream held a meeting to share updates on knowledge mobilization outcomes, fieldwork progress, and data analysis across the three local contexts. The team also reviewed and discussed research questions to guide the next steps toward cross-cultural and transnational analysis.

4.1. EDID Vietnam 2024

Written By: Hoa Bui

The Engendering Disability-Inclusive Development (EDID) partnership is a collaboration between Hanoi Association of People with Disabilities, Guelph University, and Carleton University. We build on established relationships with NGOs, policy makers, and researchers to improve the lives of diverse girls and women with disabilities in Canada, Haiti, South Africa, and Vietnam. In Vietnam, we are investigating how diverse women and girls with disabilities have participated in decision-making processes and how they navigate their leadership within their social, cultural, and political lives. Over the first and second phases of fieldwork in Hanoi, Vietnam, women and girls with disabilities collaborated with the research team to identify the barriers to their participation, decision-making, and leadership. We examined the impact of relevant laws and policies on women and girls with disabilities' socio-political lives and we supported them in developing the manifestos for their advocacy and activism.

The third EDID fieldwork in Vietnam took place in Hanoi in June 2024, with the participation of 17 women and girls with disabilities. The theme for this session was "Women and Girls with Disabilities and Media Communications: Ways of Bringing about Social Change", which was the topic proposed by the women and girls with disabilities from Vietnam. This highlights the importance of consulting with women and girls with disabilities and the recognition of their agency in decision-making and in guiding the direction of the research. Over three days of the workshop, the EDID participants identified diverse forms of communication and their communication messages, in an effort to mobilize their knowledge and advocate for their communities.

Drawing on the initial results from the fieldwork in 2022 and 2023, and in an effort to mobilize the knowledge produced by the participants, the EDID research team has also developed a factsheet about the key issues identified by the women and girls involved. The factsheet highlights important findings about barriers to their participation and leadership, as well as their advocacy and activism. This factsheet also serves as a tool for our local partners to advocate for their communities.



Introduction

Girls and women with disabilities in Vietnam encounter various forms of struggles and barriers to accessing resources, due to prejudices associated with both their disability and gender.

Women and girls with disabilities in Vietnam are absent from some policies and laws.

- The Law on Gender Equality (Government of Vietnam, 2016, Law 75/2016/QH13) highlights equality between men and women and prohibits all forms of gender discrimination. However, it does not specifically mention disabilities.
- The Law on Persons with Disabilities (Government of Vietnam, 2012) includes minimal mention of gender and does not specifically address girls with disabilities.
- The amended Law on Children (Government of Vietnam, 2016, Law No. 102/2016/QH13, Article 10) categorizes disabled children within a specially designated group called "children in special circumstances."
- Girls and women with disabilities are not mentioned in the Law on Education (No. 43/QH 2019), the Circular 05/2018/TT-BGDĐT on Inclusive Education for Persons with Disabilities, and the Circular 43/2015 on Educational Policies for Persons with Disabilities.

Source: Nguyen, N. T., Garcia, M., & Bui, T. (2023). *Equality in 45: Women through consulting for inclusive and disability-led research as a means of empowering girls with disabilities*. *EDID Vietnam Case Study*, 10-15, 10-11.



Only 8.4% of women with disabilities are household heads, compared to 31.4% of women without disabilities.

Source: Statistics from 2022, 2023.

Men with disabilities are much more likely to assume the role of household head compared to women with disabilities.

58% of men with disabilities serve as household heads, compared to only 8.4% of women with disabilities.

The disparity in leadership roles at home between women with and without disabilities, suggesting that disability significantly affects women's likelihood of assuming head-of-household responsibilities.

Source: Statistics from 2022, 2023.

The Engendering Disability Inclusive Development (EDID) partnership builds on established relationships with NGOs, policy makers, and researchers to improve the lives of diverse girls and women with disabilities in Canada, Haiti, South Africa, and Vietnam. Within the Vietnam case studies, we examine how diverse women and girls with disabilities in Vietnam have participated in decision-making processes in relation to their social, cultural, and political lives to foster leadership, inclusion, gender equality, and transformative justice in their communities.

EDID participants in Vietnam	Number
Girls and Women, including two key informants	17
Key Informants	9
Total	26



Photo: EDID participants in a disability group activity in 2023.

A disparity in upper secondary school attendance, with only 33.56% of children with disabilities attending, compared to 68.65% of children without disabilities.

This indicates a significant drop-off in educational continuation for children with disabilities.

Source: Statistics from 2022, 2023, p. 10.

The first page of EDID's Fact Sheets

4.2. Decolonial Partnerships Project (DEPA)

Written By: Dana Corfield

The Decolonial Partnerships Project (DEPA) is a focused component within the larger ENGAGE project and is funded by an International Research Seed Grant from Carleton University. This project seeks to better understand the barriers, tensions, and opportunities inherent in partnerships between groups in the Global South and the Global North (as well as between groups with differing degrees of power within the same context), and to deepen our understanding of how girls and women with disabilities can be meaningfully included in such partnerships. To investigate these themes, we conducted in-depth interviews with key ENGAGE partners from the Global South, and with other academics and community leaders who live and work in these regions. We also analyzed the principle take-aways from our ENGAGE partnership meetings and our decolonial partnership webinar. From this data, several important and interesting insights have emerged, shedding light on the complex dynamics involved in decolonial collaborations.

The findings highlighted several critical themes, including the impact of funding and power imbalances, the politics of voice, and the importance of prioritizing local expertise in international collaborations. Participants also emphasized the challenges posed by lingering colonial structures (both institutional and implicit) and underscored the value of contextual understanding, flexibility, and responsiveness to local needs. Additionally, the data revealed that solidarity, deep listening, and trust-building are essential foundations for decolonial practices in collaborative work.

We are currently in the process of creating a Fact Sheet to summarize these findings and we are exploring additional formats—such as academic papers and workshops—to engage diverse audiences and amplify the impact of this work. We warmly invite your suggestions and involvement and look forward to sharing more updates with you soon!

4.3. A Luoi Girls and Women with disabilities Club and Blind Association

Written By: Panh Ho and Linh Dang

On Vietnamese People with Disabilities Day, April 18, 2024, three representatives of women and girls with disabilities, along with the Blind Association, participated in a celebration event in Thua Thien Hue City. The event's theme was "Women with Disabilities: Confidently Shining and Discovering Their Potential." Since its official launch in October 2024, members of the A Luoi Girls and Women with Disabilities Club have participated in various community fairs, competitions and forums to raise their voices and increase their representation.



A Luoi Girls and Women with Disabilities Club won second place in the Cultural Performance Contest for Promoting Disability Policies in Thua Thien Hue Province.

4.4. Blind SA

Written By: Lerato Jiyane

Throughout this year, Blind SA has been actively advocating for and promoting the rights of people with visual impairments in South Africa through impactful initiatives:

78th General Assembly: From October 23–25, 2024, Blind SA held their annual general assembly to celebrate achievements, elect new leadership, and launch the Setswana Text To Speech (TTS)- Dimpho. New leaders were elected to key committees addressing areas such as accessible publications, education, advocacy, youth, economic empowerment, and gender-based violence, ensuring a robust and inclusive leadership structure.

Advocacy for the Copyright Amendment Bill: On September 20, 2024, Blind SA and Section 27 organized a demonstration at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, advocating for the signing of the Copyright Amendment Bill. The campaign emphasizes accessibility, particularly in braille, and mobilized broad support under messages like “End the Book Famine,” highlighting the power of collective action.

Entrepreneurship training program: Blind SA launched Small, Micro, and Medium-sized Enterprise (SMME) initiatives to empower entrepreneurs with visual impairments across South Africa. These training programs focus on skill-building, business development, and leveraging technology to foster growth. The initiative aims to promote inclusion and challenge stereotypes about visual impairments in entrepreneurship.

Empowered by Mobility: Happy, a single mother in Gauteng, has gained the skills to navigate her environment independently with the support and guidance of Blind SA. Her story highlights the transformative impact of tailored support for individuals with visual impairments, fostering confidence and autonomy in their daily lives.



Happy Navigating her way to and from the Tank.

V. KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

To mobilize the knowledge of women and girls with disabilities across the global South, our research team have engaged in various Knowledge Mobilization activities:

- ✔ Submitting a book proposal, titled Learning with and from the Global South: Emerging insights from decolonial disability work to Palgrave MacMillan, scheduled to be published in the summer 2026. Editors include Xuan Thuy Nguyen, Nandini Ghosh, and Dana Corfield. Various ENGAGE and EDID team members have been invited to contribute to the books.
- ✔ Guest editing a themed issue, Conversations with the global South: Towards decolonial disability futurities, a special themed issue of Reviews of Disability Studies (Guest editors: Xuan Thuy Nguyen, Shilpa Anand, and Alexis Padilla, with contributions from Nandini Ghosh, Suchandra Bhaduri, Nhi Truong, and Dana Corfield).
- ✔ Contributing a book chapter, Building leadership with women and girls with disabilities in Vietnam: A decolonial approach to knowledge generation as collective struggles (Nguyen et al., forthcoming), to the book Approaches to Making Change with Women and Girls with Disabilities (Palgrave MacMillan) edited by Deborah Stienstra, David R. Black, and Lenore Latta.
- ✔ Presenting at various academic and non-academic platforms.
 - Presenting at the Canadian Association for the Study of International Development (CASID) in June 2024.
 - Contributing a conference section, titled “Conversations with the global South: Towards decolonial disability futurities” at the International Symposium on the Global South Studies, Thai Binh Duong University in August 2025.
 - Virtually presenting a conference session titled: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Advocacy: Local Knowledge from Women and Girls with Disabilities from the Global South” at the International Symposium on the Global South Studies, Thai Binh Duong University in August 2025.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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A Luoi Blind Association (Vietnam)
Blind South Africa (South Africa)
Disabled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN; Canada)
Shanta Memorial Rehabilitation Centre (SMRC; India)
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