



How to Talk About Disability and Human Rights

A FrameWorks MessageBrief

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Introduction

The adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006 signaled a major paradigm shift in the field of disability rights. Building on years of advocacy on the part of the disability rights community, the CRPD codifies the principle that, rather than being vulnerable objects of charity, people with disabilities are active agents who are entitled to “enjoy the same standards of equality, rights, and dignity as everyone else.”¹ Realizing the CRPD’s aspirations will require more than just capitalizing on current momentum, however. A rich body of scholarship on social change suggests that movements are most successful when they coalesce around, and effectively disseminate, a *unified* framing strategy that mobilizes people to action.²

This MessageBrief represents an initial step toward crafting this framing strategy. The goal is to identify current framing practices among the disability rights community; critically analyze these practices from a framing perspective; and provide framing recommendations that can help advocates in the field communicate more effectively. The MessageBrief is divided into four sections:

- 1) The first section (“The Story You Are Telling”) inventories the primary themes that organizations are communicating about disability and human rights.
- 2) The second section (“Current Framing Practices”) summarizes the general strategies that organizations are using to communicate these themes and analyzes these strategies from a framing

perspective.

- 3) The third section (“How to Communicate More Effectively”) provides framing strategies that can help experts and advocates communicate more effectively about disability and human rights.
- 4) The final section (“Future Research Directions”) identifies areas where additional communications research is needed to identify the most effective ways to translate messages about disability and human rights for the donor community and the general public.

Research Base

Two main sources of data inform the research findings and framing recommendations in this MessageBrief:

Materials review. This brief reviews more than 55 communications materials sampled from 20 organizations involved in the disability rights field (see Appendix A for a list of these organizations). FrameWorks’ project partners first provided research staff with a list of key organizations. This list of organizations was entered into Issue Crawler, a Web-based application that “crawls” organizational sites and compiles the shared links among organizations (including those both in the original set and those identified during the crawl).³ Issue Crawler then uses “link analysis” to determine the network of the most influential organizations by measuring the numbers of co-links. The disability-focused organizations with the highest number of co-links were selected for the sample, along with other organizations that expert consensus deemed important members of the field. FrameWorks then gathered approximately three communications materials from each organization. Materials included press releases, blog posts, organizational mission statements, and annual reports.

Existing FrameWorks’ research on framing social issues. For more than 15 years, FrameWorks has conducted communications research on topics such as early childhood development, addiction, immigration reform, climate change, environmental health, and aging. This cross-sector and multi-method research has yielded a set of best practices for framing social issues—general communications strategies that have proven effective regardless of specific issue area. This report harvests and distills these general recommendations and considers their applicability to disability and human rights.

The Story You Are Telling: Themes in Disability Rights Communications Materials

1. Disability is prevalent. Nearly all organizations in the sample argued that disability issues deserve sustained and focused attention simply by virtue of the *size* of the population of people with disabilities. In general, organizations relied on a select set of statistics to make this point:

An estimated 17 percent of people in the Pacific have some form of disability.

One in seven people have a disability. That's over one billion people worldwide.

There are an estimated one billion people, or 15 percent of the world's population, living with a disability.

One billion people worldwide are disabled.

These statistics, which generally appeared in the introductory paragraphs of communications materials—if not in the first sentence—appeared repeatedly across the sample of materials.

2. Disability does not define a person. Organizations emphasized that people with disabilities should not be seen as “vulnerable recipients of charity,” whose lives and contributions are defined solely on the basis of their disability, but rather as active agents. A number of organizations further advocated for the shift to a *social* model of disability, which asserts that disability is not a feature inherent to an individual but rather is located in the interaction between the individual and his or her environment.

Despite growing evidence of the number and marginalization of people with disabilities, most leaders still see people with disabilities as vulnerable recipients of charity, rather than as the powerful agents of change we know them to be.

Disability has too long been viewed as a problem of the individual and not the relationships between an individual and his/her environment.

The [organization name] will continue to turn the tide of persons with disabilities being viewed as a burden, dependent and useless, to individuals with dignity and potential to become equal partners and active contributors to their families, communities, and nations.

3. People with disabilities face discrimination, injustice, and barriers to full participation in society.

Nearly all organizations emphasized that people with disabilities face numerous forms of disadvantage and discrimination that prevent them from fully participating in society. They described several ways in which these barriers manifest:

- **Societal attitudes, stigma, and abuse.** Organizations described how, particularly in low-income countries, disability is highly stigmatized and people with disabilities are shunned, marginalized, and isolated from the rest of their communities. They emphasized that people with disabilities—particularly women and children—are at greater risk of violence and physical abuse. In many cases, organizations offered vivid and graphic examples of the extreme forms of violence that people with disabilities frequently experience.

Women with disabilities are at least two to three times more likely than women without disabilities to experience violence and abuse in various spheres, and they are

likely to experience abuse over a longer period of time, resulting in more severe injuries.

The examples of cruelty and neglect are almost endless: Babies tied to their cribs. Children with disabilities who go without medical care and are left to die. Infants who don't cry when they wake because they learn there is no point in crying because no one will come.

Irene's Story: "One night, when I was sleeping alone, a man who was drunk entered my home and started raping me. My husband was not around. He had gone to look for food. No one came to rescue me, and the man raped and beat me. I know the man. He lives in the neighborhood. The man was arrested and was held for only one day." — Irene, a woman with communicative and physical disabilities in Uganda.

- **Unequal educational, economic, and employment opportunities.** Organizations offered extensive descriptions of the extent to which people with disabilities are denied equal educational, economic, and employment opportunities compared to people without disabilities. Many organizations emphasized, in particular, the bi-directional relationship between disability and poverty, particularly in low-income countries.

Less than 10 percent of children with disabilities in the Asia Pacific region attend school, compared to 70 percent of children who do not have a disability.

Despite their enormous numbers, society has largely ignored people with disabilities. This is a population with a global literacy rate of just 3 percent, and a 90 percent unemployment rate.

Disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. It is a core factor in chronic (as opposed to transient) poverty, and therefore needs to be at the heart of the development process if it is to be truly effective.

- **Mobility and accessibility barriers.** Several organizations described the ways in which features of the built environment and basic social and information services systematically disadvantage people with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities face widespread lack of accessibility to built environments, from roads and housing to public buildings and spaces, basic urban services such as sanitation and water, health, education, transportation, and emergency response programmes. Barriers to information and communications, including relevant technologies and cultural attitudes, including negative stereotyping and stigma, also contribute to the exclusions and marginalization of persons with disabilities in urban environments.

One of the most obvious and egregious barriers to access to justice for women with disabilities is the physical barrier to courthouses and other institutions of the justice system.

4. These barriers are human rights violations. Organizations consistently and repeatedly asserted that “disability rights are human rights”—that people with disabilities, in other words, have the right to full and equal participation in all spheres of society. To the extent that people with disabilities are unable to participate fully in society because of discrimination, injustice, and social barriers, their human rights are violated.

A human rights approach to disability implies that all people are active subjects with legal claims and that persons with disabilities need to participate in all spheres of society on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers.

The principle of non-discrimination in the exercise and enjoyment of human rights is fundamental, and applies to all persons with disabilities.

Many of the world’s more than one billion people with disabilities are routinely denied even the most basic human rights, particularly in the developing world.

5. Societies have an obligation to ensure full inclusion and participation of people with disabilities.

In keeping with the understanding that people with disabilities “have the right to live full lives, without limitations imposed by attitudes or by social or physical barriers,” organizations argued that societies and governments must take steps to ensure the full economic, educational, political, and social inclusion of people with disabilities. However, they also emphasized that people with disabilities are central actors in this process, and that their participation in efforts to ensure their rights is paramount. In making this point, organizations repeatedly referenced the disability community’s slogan, “Nothing about us without us.”

The obligation to prevent gender-based violence requires governments to enact laws and policies that address gender-based violence, in addition to taking steps to dismantle the stereotypes and cultural practices that contribute to violence against women with disabilities.

Governments have a duty to ensure that the benefits of reform and development programs in every field also reach disabled citizens. Special measures to affect this should be incorporated into governments’ planning process and administrative structures.

While governments, donors, and agencies are overwhelmed with many competing priorities during emergencies, they should ensure that the needs and concerns of people with disabilities are addressed in humanitarian efforts.

6. Current financial, legislative, and legal commitments to ensure disability rights are inadequate.

Organizations repeatedly emphasized that current financial and legislative commitments do not match the scope of the issue and asserted that societies must provide additional financial and legal resources to ensure the full human rights of individuals with disabilities. In making this argument, organizations pointed again to the size of the population of people with disabilities as a justification for the commitment of additional resources.

Fifteen percent of human beings live with some form of disability, yet this population typically received just 3 percent of foundation funding.

Lack of legal infrastructure to protect the rights of the world's most vulnerable populations—namely children and women with disabilities—compounds the problems caused by poverty and social exclusion.

Current Framing Practices: Summary and Commentary

The patterns of communication described above can be distilled into five primary framing strategies: *Unframed Facts and Numbers*, *Description Instead of Explanation*, *Problems Without Solutions*, *Crisis Stories*, and *Vivid Cases*. Below, we discuss each of these strategies and describe their implications for those communicating about disability issues. In the final section, we provide a set of reframing strategies to advance efforts to communicate more effectively about disability and human rights.

1. Unframed Facts and Numbers

Organizational materials in the sample relied heavily on the use of statistics, facts, and numbers to emphasize the scope of the issue. In other words, facts are a primary framing strategy in the field. The assertion underlying these numerical statements is that disability issues deserve our collective attention because the population of people with disabilities is extremely large.

In research on a wide range of issues including criminal justice reform,⁴ immigration reform⁵ and climate change,⁶ FrameWorks researchers—as well as social scientists—have found that a “just the facts” approach is frequently ineffective (and even counterproductive) in advancing support for policies or practices. There are two primary reasons that facts, when presented alone, fare so poorly as a communications strategy. First, numbers provide little explanatory power; on their own, they do not help people understand underlying causes, effects, or opportunities for remediation. Second, when facts or numbers are provided without an organizing principle, or frame, that helps the audience understand the larger story that the numbers are meant to tell, people easily default to their existing ways of understanding the issue. In most cases, these dominant understandings direct people *away* from perspectives that allow for productive issue engagement and problem-solving.

2. Description Instead of Explanation

In keeping with their reliance on facts and numbers, the organizational materials sampled had a clear pattern of prioritizing *description* over *explanation*. Materials focused on two main themes. First, they described the characteristics of the population of people with disabilities, discussing its size, for example, or its demographic composition. Second, materials described the types of discrimination and disadvantage that people with disabilities frequently encounter and the need to institute new laws and policies to address these problems. Few materials explained *how* problems—and their solutions—actually work. For example, while many materials stated that poverty is associated with disability, few explained *why* this relationship exists. Similarly, organizations repeatedly emphasized that disability is shaped by the social environment (as opposed to being an inherent feature of an individual), but they did not explain *why* or *how* this happens.

FrameWorks has tested the effectiveness of description, as compared to explanation, in numerous issue areas and has repeatedly found that “cause-and-effect” style communications are much more effective in building support for solutions and helping people understand how problems can be addressed.⁷ When people understand how a problem works and what its causes are, they are much better positioned to understand how a given policy and program can solve that problem.

3. Problems Without Solutions

The communications materials in the sample focused their descriptions sharply on *the problem*—that is, descriptions tended to entail inventories of the many ways in which people with disabilities are systematically excluded, discriminated against, and prevented from participating fully in society. In comparison, very little attention was paid to the *solutions* that exist to address these problems. The imbalance between problems and solutions will likely exacerbate fatalistic attitudes; without a greater emphasis on solutions, people are likely to conclude that the challenges to ensuring equal rights for people with disabilities are simply too great to be solved. These fatalistic attitudes, in turn, prevent people from meaningfully engaging with the issue or productively considering potential solutions.

4. Crisis Stories

Crisis framing emphasizes the overwhelming scope of a problem, using numbers, facts, and vivid examples (see below) as evidence of great urgency. Using crisis language is a common strategy; communicators assume it will boost people’s sense that an issue must be solved and increase support for solutions. Communications materials in this sample used crisis language to emphasize the extent to which people with disabilities face discrimination, disadvantage, and abuse.

FrameWorks research and other social science studies have consistently found crisis language to be ineffective. Rather than causing people to want to fix a problem, crisis frames actually immobilize people—leading them to conclude that the problem is too big and too overwhelming to solve and that

no viable solutions exist.⁸ In this sense, crisis language is likely to *depress*, rather than elevate, issue engagement and support for solutions.

5. *Vivid Cases*

Vivid examples are often used to buttress crisis stories and amplify urgency messages. Many of the communications materials sampled in this analysis employed vivid and graphic examples of violence and discrimination against people with disabilities as a means to reinforce the severity and scope of the problem.

As with crisis framing, vivid individual cases often fail to work in the way advocates intend.⁹ While vivid stories about individual people may heighten issue salience, they also imply that causes and solutions are located at the *individual* level. As a result, people have difficulty considering collective, systemic solutions, such as increased public investments or policy changes. That's because people tend to match their understanding of the scope of a problem with their perception of effective solutions. Communications that focus extensively on individual-level tragedies through the use of vivid examples and case studies define problems at *individual*, rather than societal, levels and discourage considerations of systemic solutions. For example, in the first-person account of rape excerpted above, framing theory suggests that readers are likely to focus on the “evil rapist” who assaulted the “vulnerable disabled woman” but not the social, economic, and political contexts that increase the likelihood that people with disabilities will experience violence and abuse. Vivid individual examples also frequently tap into and reinforce stereotypes of groups and individuals.

How to Communicate More Effectively

In the following section, we provide reframing strategies that can be used to expand understanding of disability rights and enhance support for relevant policies and investments. These recommendations represent framing “best practices,” culled from more than a decade and a half of FrameWorks’ communications research across a wide range of social issues.

Recommendation #1: Tell a thematic story.

While stories are central to communicating about social change, not all stories are equally effective from a framing perspective. Social science research has found that “episodic stories,” which tell stories from an individual perspective in an attempt to illuminate an issue by personalizing it, affect thinking in the same way that vivid cases do: They lead people to attribute outcomes to the individuals involved rather than to broader systems. By contrast, “thematic stories,” which foreground systemic factors and the role of context as key characters in the story, are more effective in helping people understand social problems as such and to support policy and systems-level solutions.¹⁰

Thematic stories typically include the following steps (several of which are delineated in greater detail below):

1. Lead with a *Value* that orients people to why this issue matters and refer back to that Value throughout the communication. Focus on Values that help people answer the “Why does this matter?” question at a social or collective, rather than an individual, level.
2. Introduce the specific problem and explain the *context* that shapes it. Make sure to explain how the problem works and discuss how systems and society affect it.
3. Include a *Solution* that addresses the problem, and explain *how* it works to create different outcomes.

Recommendation #2: Lead with a Value.

In strategic communications, *Values* are defined as broad perspectives that help people think about what an issue is about and why it matters.¹¹ Values provide an “orienting lens” through which people interpret what follows, answering questions like, “What is at stake?” and, “Why should I care?” Because of their critical role in orienting people to a given issue, FrameWorks recommends that disability rights advocates prime their messages with Values that help people understand *why* disability rights are a matter of *collective* concern. Identifying the Values that are most likely to elevate public support for any given issue is an empirical exercise. However, the Value of *Human Potential* (the idea that society benefits when all people are able to contribute fully) has proven effective in other closely related issue domains.¹² We suspect it will show promising results in building support for disability rights as well. Below is an example paragraph, reframed with *Human Potential*:

Original paragraph: Employment is for all persons of working age a key to combatting poverty and to achieving social inclusion and participation in society. This applies equally to persons with disabilities. In addition, employers need to be able and willing to employ persons with disabilities in order to ensure that they can hire the most competitive candidates. However, the available statistics indicate that the employment levels of persons with disabilities are usually two to three times lower than those of non-disabled people.

Reframed with Human Potential: We need the talent and contributions of all people to be available to our communities. Employment is one key way that people contribute to and participate in society. However, the available statistics indicate that the employment levels of persons with disabilities are usually two to three times lower than those of non-disabled people. In other words, we aren't tapping into all of our communities' resources and talents as well as we can. When we help everyone reach their full potential—for example, by establishing programs that ensure people with disabilities can find meaningful employment—our whole society benefits.

Recommendation #3: When explaining the problem, always combine urgency with efficacy.

Facts about the discrimination and disadvantage that people with disabilities face can focus attention and provide a needed sense of urgency. But these types of problem statements should *always* be followed by well-framed discussions of solutions. In the absence of such discussions, people are likely to fall back on default assumptions that the problem is “too big to solve.” Communications that seek to engender a sense of urgency are only powerful if they are paired with an equally powerful sense of efficacy. People need to know that the challenges people with disabilities face in exercising their full human rights are real, and also that actionable solutions exist to address this problem and improve outcomes.

***Original paragraph:** Persons with disabilities face widespread lack of accessibility to built environments, from roads and housing to public buildings and spaces, basic urban services such as sanitation and water, health, education, transportation, and emergency response programmes. Barriers to information and communications, including relevant technologies and cultural attitudes including negative stereotyping and stigma also contribute to the exclusion and marginalisation of persons with disabilities in urban environments. Too often, urban environments have served as a barrier to the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in economic and social development in cities and communities.*

***Reframed with doses of efficacy and Human Potential:** By making buildings, services, and other public resources more accessible to everyone, we can increase social inclusiveness and expand everyone’s ability to contribute more fully to our communities. Persons with disabilities face widespread lack of accessibility to built environments, from roads and housing to public buildings and spaces, and basic urban services such as sanitation and water, health, education, transportation, and emergency response programmes. As a result, they are unable to participate fully in our communities, affecting our society’s progress as a whole. But there are steps we can take to build urban environments that allow everyone to reach their full potential. For example....*

Recommendation #4: Avoid crisis language.

Using crisis language is a common strategy across many fields; communicators assume it boosts people’s sense of urgency and increases support for desired solutions. However, FrameWorks research and other social science studies have consistently found crisis language to be ineffective. In fact, crisis language is likely to *backfire* on issues where fatalistic thinking is common. On the issue of disability and human rights, messages that employ a tone of crisis may actually *depress* support for the types of policies, programs, and investments that disability rights advocates seek to promote. Advocates should instead use a reasonable, non-alarmist tone that highlights the scope of the problem and the urgent need for action, and quickly pivot to a discussion of solutions.

***Original paragraph:** People with disabilities are segregated from society in abusive institutions, living in poverty, or left without educational and economic opportunity. The concerns of people with disabilities are largely overlooked by the human rights community,*

and the threats they face grow more serious every day.

Reframed with a reasonable tone: Many people with disabilities are segregated from society through abusive institutions, poverty, or a lack of educational and economic opportunity. Ensuring that all people with disabilities are able to participate fully in their communities and contribute to our society is critical to ensuring our continued progress as a society. The human rights community must prioritize the concerns of people with disabilities and help to create collective solutions that lead to their full and active membership in our communities.

Recommendation #5: Develop and deploy examples that emphasize solutions.

As described above, explanation is a powerful tool for combatting fatalistic assumptions that “nothing” can fix a problem and increasing support for the types of solutions that experts advocate. In order to explain *how* policy, legislative, and legal changes would help ensure the full participation and inclusion of people with disabilities, communicators should include *explanatory examples of solutions*. Importantly, these examples should not merely describe the policy or program; rather, they should provide a clear, causal pathway that (1) lays out a particular challenge facing people with disabilities, (2) describes how a particular solution addresses that challenge, and (3) details the positive (and collective) outcomes that result.

Recommendation #6: Connect outcomes to society as a whole.

Advocates need to emphasize that we all benefit when all people are able to contribute to and participate in their communities to their fullest potential. This means explaining that both the positive and negative outcomes experienced by people with disabilities have effects on the broader population. When people with disabilities can participate fully, we all benefit. Conversely, when people with disabilities are limited in the ways they can participate, our society is diminished. Advocates should, when possible, link positive outcomes among people with disabilities to positive outcomes for *society as a whole*.

Recommendation #7: Contextualize numbers; don't expect them to speak for themselves.

The use of numbers and statistics can be an effective communications strategy, but only if they are properly framed. While the meaning of a given data point or statistic may be obvious to experts and advocates, people are likely to interpret numbers in unexpected and potentially unproductive ways unless they are placed within a frame that aids interpretation and guides meaning-making. This means using what FrameWorks calls Social Math, a framing strategy that translates data into comprehensible and compelling terms and channels interpretation in particular directions. When done well, Social Math allows data to become a powerful frame element—broadening public understanding and helping people think more productively about solutions.

For example, consider the following statistic: *“Less than 10 percent of children with disabilities in the Asia Pacific region attend school, compared to 70 percent of children who do not have a disability.”* This statistic is more effective with a Social Math frame (and also a dose of the Value of *Human Potential*), as the following example shows:

Less than 10 percent of children with disabilities in the Asia Pacific region attend school. This is like having a classroom with spots for 30 children to learn, but only filling three of them. When children with disabilities have access to educational opportunities that help them reach their full potential as members of society, we all benefit.

Recommendation #8: Avoid myth/fact constructions and make an affirmative case instead.

Myth/fact sheets are pervasive in communications materials, but social science research has demonstrated repeatedly that they are counterproductive. While myth/fact approaches might seem like a good strategy for correcting misconceptions, they are likely to backfire. Due to the way people process and recall information, repeating a misconception before introducing a correction actually reinforces the misconception. Studies show that myth/fact sheets can actually lead to a *decline* in understanding and regressions in policy support.¹³ Rather than restating misconceptions or myths, communicators should make the affirmative case and advance the position that they want to communicate rather than spending valuable message real estate refuting an erroneous position. In situations where it is necessary to acknowledge a misconception or outmoded way of thinking, the affirmative case should always come first to set the frame and channel thinking towards the target perception.

The following excerpt, for example, reaffirms the misperception in the first sentence by describing people with disabilities as “vulnerable recipients of charity.” This decreases the likelihood that the message will convey the desired message, which is that people with disabilities are “powerful agents of change.”

Despite growing evidence of the number and marginalization of people with disabilities, most leaders still see people with disabilities as vulnerable recipients of charity, rather than as the powerful agents of change we know them to be.

Framing theory indicates that this sentence would be more effective if rewritten in a way that makes the affirmative case, as the following sentence does. (The sentence could be even more effective if it explained the affirmative case with an example of *how* people with disabilities act as agents of change in their communities.)

Contrary to what some believe, people with disabilities are powerful agents of change.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

This MessageBrief has summarized and commented on the framing strategies currently in use to communicate information about disability and human rights. The recommendations presented here are based on framing “best practices,” gleaned from more than 15 years of communications research on a wide range of social issues, and represent important opportunities for disability rights advocates to communicate more effectively. However, there are several gaps in our existing research base that preclude our ability to make more specific reframing recommendations on this set of issues. We describe these areas below.

- **What are the dominant understandings of disability among the general public and the donor community?** The recommendations described above represent best practices, regardless of issue area and audience. There are undoubtedly other communications challenges, specific to communicating about disability and human rights, that these recommendations do not address. Identifying these challenges will require in-depth qualitative research with members of the public and the international donor community to identify and document the *specific understandings, beliefs, and assumptions* that people use to make sense of information about disability and human rights. This descriptive work is a foundational component of strategic communications research, as it forms the bedrock from which all prescriptive recommendations flow. In the absence of this type of focused descriptive research, it is difficult to identify the *specific* communications challenges that disability rights advocates are likely to encounter and in turn the communications strategies necessary to address these challenges.
- **What types of reframing tools are most effective in elevating public and donor support for disability rights?** Strategic communications is about matching specific reframing tools (Values, Metaphors, and Explanatory Chains, among others) to specific communications challenges. Because FrameWorks has not yet conducted extensive research on disability issues, we have not had the opportunity to develop reframing tools that are specific to this field. A more in-depth research engagement would provide the opportunity to develop tools that are carefully crafted to address the communications challenges that emerge from descriptive phases of research.
- **To what extent does rights-based language advance support for disability rights?** Advocates and experts consistently frame disability issues in terms of *human rights*, using language that emphasizes the common dignity of all people. FrameWorks has explored the effect of rights as a Value in relation to several other issues areas. One of the overarching findings of this and other research is that *what* you want to communicate and *how* best to communicate it are not necessarily the same thing. Even though advocates aim to build public support for efforts to ensure the human rights of people with disabilities, framing communications around the Value of human rights is not necessarily the most effective means of achieving this outcome. Finding the most effective frame is an empirical enterprise. In other domains, FrameWorks’ research found that leading with the Value of rights produced effects that were, in fact, contrary to communicators’ overall policy goals. For example, FrameWorks’ research on immigration reform found that rights-based

language tended to remind people of undocumented immigrants' illegal status and, as a result, *depressed* support for expansive reforms.¹⁴ In research on children's issues, people were more likely to support public steps to ensure and protect children's rights when these discussions were framed in terms of civic responsibility as opposed to child rights.¹⁵ These projects demonstrate that people have a thin, and sometimes counterproductive, understanding of the concept of rights. As a result, they often need an *explanation* about what rights are and why they are important, rather than a simple assertion of their value. Whether rights-based language actually elevates public support for disability issues is an empirical question that requires dedicated and focused research.

Given the gaps identified above, this MessageBrief is best viewed as an initial step in a broader effort to reframe public and donor understandings of disability rights. The recommendations provided here have the potential to significantly improve communications practices; original communications research provides an opportunity for the disability rights community to build a comprehensive and unified framing strategy for mobilizing social change.

Appendix A: Organizations Sampled for the Materials Review

1. Handicap International
2. Christian Blind Mission
3. International Disability Alliance
4. World Blind Union
5. Disabled Persons International
6. International Development and Disability Consortium
7. European Disability Forum
8. Disability Rights Fund
9. Pacific Disability Forum
10. Action on Disability and Development
11. Basic Needs
12. Human Rights Watch
13. Disability Rights International
14. Inclusion International
15. World Federation of the Deaf
16. Mental Disability Advocacy Center
17. Women Enabled
18. UN Enable
19. United States International Council on Disability
20. American Association of People with Disabilities

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Disability/Pages/DisabilityIndex.aspx>

² Benford, R., & Snow, D.A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 611-639.

³ For more information see, <http://www.issuecrawler.net>.

⁴ Gilliam, F. D., & Simon, A. F. (2013). *Framing and facts: Necessary synergies in communicating about public safety and criminal justice*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁵ O'Neil, M., Kendall-Taylor, N., & Bales, S.N. (2014). *Finish the story on immigration: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁶ Simon, A., Volmert, A., Bunten, A., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2014). *The value of explanation: using values and causal explanations to reframe climate and ocean change*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁷ For additional information on causal explanation and its effects on public understanding, see: [FrameWorks Institute. \(2009\). *Creating causal chains: A FrameWorks Institute FrameByte*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute](#). For FrameWorks research that explores the effectiveness of explanation as opposed to description, see: Fond, M., Lindland, E., Morgan, P., Simon, A., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2015). [All aboard: Explanatory tools to talk about children's well-being in Jacksonville](#). Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute; Volmert, A. (2014). [Getting to the heart of the matter: Using metaphorical and causal explanation to increase public understanding of climate and ocean change](#). Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

⁸ For additional information on the crisis frame and its effects on public understanding, see: [FrameWorks Institute. \(2009\) *The storytelling power of numbers*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute](#) and [FrameWorks Institute \(2009\). *Strategic framing during the economic downturn: Remembering the long view*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute](#).

⁹ For additional information on vivid cases and their effects on public understanding, see [FrameWorks Institute. \(2006\). *Vivid examples: What they mean and why you should be careful using them*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute](#).

¹⁰ On thematic and episodic stories, see Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

¹¹ Rokeach, M. (1973). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

¹² Bales, S. N., Volmert, A., Baran, M., O'Neil, M., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2015). [Talking human services: A FrameWorks MessageMemo](#). Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute; Bales, S. N., & O'Neil, M. (Eds.). (2014). [Putting it back together again: Reframing education using a core story approach. A FrameWorks MessageMemo](#). Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

¹³ Skurnik, I., Yoon, C., Park, D. C., & Schwarz, N. (2005). How warnings about false claims become recommendations. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 713-724.

¹⁴ O'Neil, M., Kendall-Taylor, N., & Bales, S. N. (2014). *Finish the story on immigration: A FrameWorks MessageMemo*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.

¹⁵ Simon, A., Volmert, A., & Kendall-Taylor, N. (2014). *The potency of potential: Values to bring Jacksonville together to support children*. Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute.