

Chapter 2:

Measuring the environment

Given that disability arises from the interaction between personal and environmental characteristics it is important to capture information about both types of factors.

There are two different ways of capturing the environment.¹⁰ The first is at the individual level. This reflects the actual interaction between a person and their immediate environment. It includes their home, their workplace, the market where they shop, their place of worship, the schools they attend, the government offices they visit, the buses they ride on, and any other space or institution with which they interact. It deals with the physical environment — both structures and materials — as well as people’s attitudes and the rules/ laws or policies that are in place. The second is at the societal level of environment that encompasses all the various systems providing goods and services for the whole society — education, health care, shelter, police and fire protection, food, entertainment and recreation.

The individual level is only a subset of the societal level, and is prescribed by each person’s immediate environment and the activities that they are engaged — or attempting to engage — in.

10 Altman, Barbara (2011). *Measuring Environmental Factors in an International Context: A Social System Perspective for an Extended Question Set*, Washington Group Working Paper.

Capturing the environment at a societal level requires something akin to an environmental audit. For example, a checklist for evaluating the accessibility of a community health clinic or a school should include accessibility concerns of people with various forms of disabilities, such as the distances between the public transport drop off areas (i.e., bus stops) and the building's accessible route, the condition of parking spaces, elevators, entrance doors or floor surfaces.

To capture attitudinal barriers would require a survey on attitudes, for example a Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice Survey (KAPS), which is an approach widely used to gather information for project planning and development, though some analysts question the reliability of asking people about their attitudes directly, especially if there is a concern that they feel they will be judged poorly for not having the politically correct viewpoint.¹¹ The KAPS, though, is also good for determining if people are aware of existing laws, policies, and services. Legal or policy barriers would have to be identified either by a desk review of existing documents and/or expert interviews.

The advantage of the societal level approach is that it can capture the full array of environmental barriers. Also, (apart from attitudinal questions) the assessments are more standardized and can be seen as more objective. However, the disadvantage is that a purely societal level approach does not identify which barriers are the main ones actually causing difficulties in people's day to day lives. Therefore, it may not be as useful in determining which environmental barriers should be prioritized when it comes to planning public policy.

The relevance of the various points made in this section are revisited as they pertain to the particular indicators addressed later in this guidebook.

Availability. The term “availability” is included in a number of Incheon Strategy Indicators. Availability can be considered at several levels, for example, the expression “availability of a government programme.” On the most basic level, this could simply refer to whether such a programme exists. However, there may be barriers to accessing that programme. In order to receive benefits, a person must know about the programme, be able to apply, and then once accepted to the programme there must be adequate funding and effective administration to provide goods and services to all eligible recipients. Moreover, the application procedure and eligibility requirements must be properly constructed to reach the desired population.

Clearly the first notion of availability — *does the programme exist?* — is much easier to track, especially on an annual basis. An indicator that gets at the more in-depth notion of

11 Launiala, Annika (2009). How much can a KAP survey tell us about people's knowledge, attitudes and practices? Some observations from medical anthropology research on malaria in pregnancy in Malawi, *Anthropology Matters Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1.

availability requires extensive data collection in order to assess not just if the programme exists, but how well it is working.

For the purpose of the Incheon Strategy Indicators, availability refers to whether a programme exists. This is a more obtainable indicator. However, it is highly recommended that special studies be conducted every few years in order to assess if available programmes are effectively reaching the intended population.