



*Figure: The Rotary Club of World Disability Advocacy logo, with a graphic image of people holding hands while encircling our planet.*

Zoom transcription of the Rotary Club of World Disability Advocacy's monthly meeting, on August 23, 2021.

*Shown, are Eastern Times.*

*Any typographical errors have not been corrected.*

**10:54 AM**

Rotary sent me the following definition of Disabilities that they are using. They are asking for our opinions of this definition. I look to your comments before writing back to her  
Disability — A condition of function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual or group. The term is used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment, mental illness, and various types of chronic disease.

**11:31 AM**

This is problematic Ken. Rotary is using what appears to be a medical determination in its definition. The word "impairment" should not be used.

We should be in alignment with the UN

**11:33 AM**

The UN also uses the word “impairment” but we should avoid doing so.

**11:34 AM**

Once again, and I’m assuming here, an organization creates a statement or definition that effects the disabled without actually having someone disabled belong with the statement/definition. Representation matters always

**11:50 AM**

The ADA (Americans with disabilities act) states “A person with a disability is a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities”

**11:53 AM**

We should rather use the United Nations definition which very importantly incorporates that the barriers alongside the various impairments create the disability.

Mark, I am not sure about your thing against the word impairments. I can’t imagine you could go very far in defining disability without bringing up that word.

**11:54 AM**

Here is what I typically use when speaking and the question of definition comes up. “Disability is an injury, illness or condition that interferes with an individuals ability to perform one or more of the functions of daily life” when I speak in countries where disability is taboo. I add “it is also a status that prevents and individual from exercising one or more of a citizens rights

**11:55 AM**

Jeremy. Very true. I struggle with it. I am usually impaired after 7-8 beers but not because I am deaf

**11:55 AM,**

Ken, rather look up the UNCRPD.

United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. This will re-iterate the issue about barriers

**11:56 AM**

I think that's the most important thing Ken. Being in alignment with the UN. I just hate the word impairment

**11:57 AM**

I suppose one could stick with condition...

Funny, I have no problem at with impairment at all. My eyes are broken! Surely that is an impairment

**11:59 AM** It is universally acceptable. I do however believe that the definition set out by RI has far to many "impairments"

**12:01 PM:**

We have to use the words recognized by the United Nations. If I say that the law made for us creates discrimination.

**12:08 PM**

We are made disabled by barriers that hinders us to function properly..

I Grace I use wheelchair to move around...when they put stairs, sockets, sinks etc at high point I can't access that's makes me disabled, otherwise if you remove barriers I can do what 'abled' can do ..

**12:19 PM**

Very good point grace. I am not disabled until I walk out my front door into an inaccessible society.

**12:20 PM**

That's right! That is the classic social model definition. However, I think I know where Mark is going with this and that is there are times when our conditions prevent us from doing things even without societal barriers. One example would be Mark even with his hearing aids, is unlikely to hear birds singing. And I am never going to see the birds.

So sometimes it is not always about barriers, however, in society when we want to be included, this is when barriers appear and prevent us from equal participation.

**12:33 PM**

For people who are Deaf, they prefer to be addressed as the Deaf not hearing impaired. Besides, there is no association for the hearing impaired but rather associations of the Deaf. The argument is that if you are impaired it means that if they fix the impairment you could be ok which is negative or discriminatory in a way instead of removing the barriers and create a conducive environment for all which is a human rights approach. The term impairment is mostly advocated by scholars not people with disabilities themselves. Issues of terminology has its own unending debate

**12:36 PM**

This is not strictly true there are hearing impaired organisations and very far exceed the numbers of the totally deaf or profoundly deaf. Those who are hard of hearing which is the preferred term are often overlooked by the profoundly deaf community.

**12:46 PM**

Birds sing?

**12:46 PM**

This debate is interesting. I like it. I think the word impairment is mostly informed by medical approach of disability. As Betty explained, the medical approach sees disability as something that can be fixed. I tend to think so.

I however like the United Nations definition, its not by far with our Kenyan definition

**12:51 PM**

This is the Kenyan. It still contains the word impairment. Observing keenly the other statements, on the definition, its almost impossible to avoid the word impairment

“disability” means a physical, sensory, mental or other impairment, including any visual, hearing, learning or physical incapability, whether arising from natural or artificial causes, which is irreversible and long term and which impacts adversely on a person's capacity to participate.

**1:23 PM**

Re: Mark's comment: "I am not disabled until I walk out my front door into an inaccessible society." This should be the messaging for our awareness-building campaigns - although with "walk" replaced by either "go" or "exit." The same can be said about any oppressed people. In the U.S., for example, "I am not Black until I walk out my front door into a racist society."

BTW:

I'm disabled after only two beers ;-)

**1:54 PM,**

One beer does it for me. I wonder how this discussion will work in a different language.

**1:55 PM,**

Afraid so Mark, sorry to break it to you, but apparently they do sing

I say apparently because I have no idea what they look like and only have other people's word for it that they are birds!

**2:27 PM,**

this video provided to me from Nick from the Carol Center in Massachusetts fits into this conversation

**2:27 PM,**

<https://youtu.be/0e24rfTZ2CQ>

**2:31 PM,**

On another subject: On my journey's around the world, I have been told that the word "empowerment" often is misinterpreted as meaning "money" so it is best not use the word in Club media to avoid confusion.

**3:06 PM**

Wow! Empowerment is a huge word in my country, not just from a disability point of view but particularly from a race and gender point of view

It literally means the opposite of disempowerment, which is much like this in franchisement

And in terms of disability this empowerment, it is entirely because so little has been done to encourage inclusion as to descend power the entire community

**3:10 PM,**

I agree. I am surprised. But I have run into a problem with it several times now. Maybe members that are better informed than me can contribute

**3:18 PM**

I have heard some grumblings about this word lately and I believe it is coming from two places. One appears to be in developing nations where empowerment can be misused to mean financially better off. The other is in America where disabled people are sometimes criticized for success, a form of ableism. "We gave you benefits and you damn well better like it". With empowerment these same people can sometimes misunderstand and believe "empowerment" means they are somehow doing better than society intended. This is my opinion based on some of the feedback I have heard on this word. Two months ago it was never an issue

**3:22 PM**

Thank you Ken for that video. I was going to suggest that we use Tom Shakespeare as a great thinker on the issue of the social model. As you can see, it is not a straightforward issue. Very nuanced and complex.

**3:31 PM,**

Thank you for sharing

**3:31 PM,**

You mean, discussion about beer in different languages?? Beer is good in any language!! Hahaha

But seriously, these terms struggles are getting really strange, it seems it's all about what is politically correct or not. We have the same issues in Portuguese and in Brazil.

**3:34 PM**

As to Empowerment , we use that expression - in English - meaning "to give more power" to minorities, specially to women

**3:36 PM**

This term! Here in Kenya when the term empowerment is mentioned people think about ' money'

Different word should be used to change this kind of thinking

**4:03 PM**

As a journalist and then as a marketing/communications consultant, I learned that only individuals can empower themselves. The rest of us can - if we choose - only help them to empower themselves. Martin Luther King Jr. got many ...

**4:07 PM**

It is important for all of us to not think always what we know but be open to what we can learn. If a word in different countries has a different meaning that is a learning opportunity

**6:01 PM,**

Also, we cannot do Madison Avenue "branding," which originated from the practice of branding cattle with hot irons. Hence, bottom-line-driven businesses brand forcibly their products and services onto the brains of unwitting consumers.

Instead, we need to practice "imagining," which demonstrates fairly and accurately the benefits and values of products/services in ways that help consumers to imagine how those things will help them in healthy and sustainable ways. So, imagining helps them to empower themselves as enlightened, informed, and liberated consumers.

The same concept/approach applies to caused-based movements. The most successful and long-lasting ones are



those that embrace imagining - such as the Bangladesh micro-loan movement formed in 1983...

**6:51 PM**

In the US I think it is problematic because of this framing- it is something that needs to be done to disabled people, not something we achieve or do ourselves- so it is therefore enabling. Independence is more common here, but I think it is vital as an international collective that we discuss these types of things through... we could create our own language guide so to be aligned.

**6:56 PM**

Only individuals can empower/enable themselves. The rest of us can - if we choose - only help them to empower/enable themselves.

<https://knowyourteam.com/blog/2017/08/16/dont-empower-anybody-the-biggest-leadership-mistake/>

**6:57 PM,**

Interesting comments. We are international enough now that we could create guidelines for language. The International Language of Disabilities

**11:42 PM,**

I like it! We need to recognize that within the diverse global culture of people with disabilities, language can have very dramatic impacts, impacts that change in intensity depending on which sub-culture within the community we are applying that language to. As Mark has demonstrated, someone who is deaf...especially someone who was born deaf, does not view their deafness as an impairment to be fixed with assistive technology or medical procedures. Whereas an amputee like

myself has no issue identifying as a person with a mobility impairment, which can be accommodated with assistive technology & medical procedures as well as universal design that removes social and physical barriers; although someone who was born without one or more limbs may not view that ...

**9:32 AM,**

Very interesting point of view, Steve. I liked it!!

**10:01 AM,**

Thanks for your comment Jeremy always insightful. I think what it comes down to is respect for the individual and also respect for the culture. And another key word is understanding. Understanding of how words and perceptions are different and why they are different. And appreciation is a third word. Appreciation for our differences.

**10:04 AM:**

I checked with one of our associated in Uganda about the word empowerment. She works with parasports and uses the word empowerment all the time. Uganda and Kenya are neighboring countries. I asked her if empowerment in Uganda meant money. She said

**10:04 AM,**

No!! the term empowerment in Uganda is used as a form to support one another to attain our potentials

**10:04 AM**

In sports we have many barriers that limit our participation, therefore the need to support each other to overcome them is thought by someone of us

**10:14 AM**

Thanks Jeremy W for that comment. Very true.

I am reading a very interesting book at the moment, disability rights and wrongs. By Tom Shakespeare. What it demonstrates, is that, there is no shortage of opinions about terminology and definition. His book is a critique of the many, many different opinions of the disability studies academics around the world. Frankly, these guys could not agree on the colour of an orange!

I think our consensus would agree that as persons with disabilities we are entitled to our own specific opinions and experiences. Adding to this, cultural and nationality differences play a significant role as well.

**-END-**