

**EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON INCLUSION
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING
COUNTRY REPORT FOR THE PHILIPPINES***

14-16 February 2006 – Bangkok, Thailand

**A. Overview of the Vocational Training System and Participation by
Persons With Disabilities**

1. Policy Framework

Legal Bases

The government's role in the development of persons with disabilities is embodied in the Philippine Constitution, Sec. 9, Article II which states that it is the policy of the state to "promote a just and dynamic social order that will ensure the prosperity and independence of the nation and free the people from poverty, through policies that provide full employment, a rising standard of living, and an improved quality of life".

In the area of vocational training, the Philippines is one of the forerunners in Asia in crafting legislations aimed at improving the socio-economic condition of persons with disabilities (PWDs). In fact, as early as 1954 it has recognized the need to provide vocational rehabilitation and mainstream employment to PWDs.

The following are some of the major laws passed by Philippine Congress and issuances from the Office of the President of the Republic of the Philippines concerning vocational training and employment of PWDs:

- Republic Act 1179 (Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1954)

This is the first law that sought to transform the PWDs from helpless and dependent individuals into productive members of society. It outlines the state's responsibility to promote vocational training for the blind and all other handicapped persons.

As an offshoot of the law, Area Vocational Rehabilitation Centers were established in selected strategic areas in the country. The Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation under the Department of Social Welfare and Development was created. The Bureau was tasked to formulate, administer and implement vocational rehabilitation programs and services, as well as the establishment of sheltered workshops across the country.

- Presidential Decree 1509 – The decree created the National Council Concerning Disabled Persons in 1978. The Council (now named National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons) serves as the policy making and coordinating body for all disability concerns.
- Presidential Decree 603 (The Child and Youth Welfare Code)

The law recognizes the rights of disabled children and provides for the expansion of specialized educational services and the assignment of vocational rehabilitation and manpower conservation agencies to train PWDs for specialized types of jobs and provide them opportunities for their future job placement.

- Presidential Decree 442 (Labor Code of the Philippines)

One chapter of this law mandates the Department of Labor and Employment to formulate and develop programs designed to improve and enhance the potentials and employability and eventually secure gainful employment of PWDs. The law likewise provides incentives to employers who participate in the training of PWDs.

- Republic Act 7277 (An Act Providing for the Rehabilitation, Self-development and Self-reliance of Disabled Persons and their

Integration into the Mainstream Society and for Other Purposes, otherwise known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons of 1992)

This law is the convergence of all legislations that were passed concerning the promotion of the rights and privileges of PWDs. It covers matters pertaining to employment, incentives for employers, vocational rehabilitation, education, health, telecommunications, accessibility, political and civil rights, and other auxiliary services that should be provided by the state to the sector.

The law requires that at least five percent (5%) of the allocation for the Private Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PESFA) shall be set aside for disabled students pursuing vocational or technical and degree courses.

Its Implementing Rules and Regulations mandates the National Manpower and Youth Council (now Technical Education and Skills Development Authority or TESDA) to include vocational rehabilitation training of PWDs as a component of its continuing human resource development program and to integrate such thrust into its corporate plan.

- Proclamation No. 125 (1993) mandates the observance in the Philippines of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons from Year 1993 to Year 2002.
- Executive Order No. 261 (1995) created the Inter-agency Committee on Employment Promotion, Protection and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities. The committee is headed by the Department of Labor and Employment and has 18 members from government agencies, non-government organizations and organizations of PWDs. Its main

task is to ensure coordination and complementation of training and employment programs for the sector.

- Proclamation No. 240 (2002) declares the period from Year 2003 to Year 2012 as the Philippine Decade of Persons with Disabilities.
- Executive Order No. 417 (2005) mandates government agencies and government owned and controlled corporations to implement the economic independence program for PWDs. In particular, the Order mandates the Department of Education, TESDA, and the Commission on Higher Education to develop a system of equivalency to ensure PWDs' access to employment and entrepreneurship. It likewise tasked TESDA to develop and implement relevant training programs, basic organizational and entrepreneurship skills that will make PWDs self-reliant.
- Executive Order No. 437 (2005) encourages the implementation of community-based rehabilitation for persons with disabilities and allocation of funds for such programs by all local government units. It likewise encourages all national government agencies to provide support to the LGUs in carrying out this task.

Roles and Responsibilities of Involved Agencies

Several national government agencies in the Philippines have specific roles and responsibilities to play in the promotion of the general welfare of PWDs. While each agency has its own programs/projects, their activities are being coordinated to ensure that there is greater efficiency, effectiveness and impact on the lives of PWDs.

The National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons (NCWDP), an attached agency to the Department of Social Welfare and Development, serves as the national policy making and coordinating agency for PWD concerns. Under it is a governing Board composed of representatives of national government offices, non-government organizations and organizations of PWDs. The members of the Board are grouped into sub-committees to handle specific PWD concerns. One of the sub-committees is for training and employment. It is chaired by the Department of Labor and Employment and co-chaired by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). The committee prepares annual action plans and the members are expected to implement specific programs or projects that address the training and employment needs of PWDs using their own agency's budget.

2-3. Nature and Methods Used to Implement the Policy/Training Options Available

Vocational training in the Philippines can be classified into three, namely: institution based, enterprise based and community based. Institution based programs are conducted in schools and training centers, enterprise based in companies, and community based in the barangays (villages).

There are three government agencies in the country that have major roles to play in the training of PWDs. These are DSWD, TESDA and DOLE. TESDA has a network of schools and training located nationwide while DSWD has four strategically located vocational rehabilitation centers (two in Luzon – Manila and Pangasinan, one in the Visayas - Cebu City, and one in Mindanao – Zamboanga City. DOLE does not have training centers but it has established partnership arrangements with other government agencies and non-government organizations for the training of PWDs. Courses in the TESDA institutions are open to all types of clients – disabled and non-disabled. DSWD vocational rehabilitation centers, on the other hand, were established solely for PWDs.

Training programs conducted in these institutions are geared towards wage employment and self-employment.

Enterprise based programs like Apprenticeship and Learnership are also open to PWDs. However, the oversupply of workers on one hand, and the perceived inadequacy of the PWDs on the other, somehow limits the PWDs' access to these training programs.

Qualified PWDs have the option to take up courses in the formal education system which is composed predominantly of privately owned institutions. The government reserves five percent (5%) of the total allocation of its Private Education Student Financial Assistance Program (PESFA) to the PWDs. Aside from this, other scholarship programs are available for PWDs.

The training program that has provided greater opportunities for the PWDs to acquire skills is the community-based program. This is because the training is conducted right in the area where the PWDs are. The skills being taught here are customized and require only a short duration to be learned.

After finishing the training programs, TESDA encourages the PWDs to undergo assessment and be certified as skilled workers. The DOLE, on the other hand, assists in the PWD graduates in their job search.

It is good to note that in the Philippines, several PWD organizations have started establishing training centers for the members of their sector. While most of the funding requirements (for buildings, equipment, personal services, operating expenses, etc.) are sourced from local and international funding institutions, technical assistance in the areas of trainers training, curriculum development and the like are extended by concerned government agencies.

4. Participation and Success Rates of Disabled Persons

As of the moment, a consolidated national data on the number of PWDs who have participated in vocational training is not available in the Philippines. While the NCWDP coordinates the programs/projects for the sector, much still has to be desired in terms of gathering and analysis of data. The Training and Employment Sub-Committee under the Board, on the other hand, is still in the process of enhancing its monitoring system.

DSWD, TESDA and DOLE have trained close to 15,000 PWDs in the past five years. In addition to this, TESDA has reported the following:

- award of scholarships for post secondary technical courses to about 500 PWDs
- assessment and certification of the skills of around 300 PWDs

Granting that the number of PWDs in the country is less than a million (based on the 2000 census), the above number shows that the efforts of the government in assisting PWDs gain employable skills need to be further intensified.

PART B. Preparation for the Working Groups

1. What does an inclusive vocational training system look like?

Ideally, every individual, disabled or non-disabled, should have equal access to vocational training opportunities. Depending on his/her aptitude, occupational interest and behavior, he should be able to choose intelligently which course to take that would help him develop his fullest potentials.

The school or training center must, first of all, offer courses that are consistent with the requirements of the labor market. It must have an accessible

environment where the PWDs could move around without restrictions. It should have complete sets of PWD-friendly facilities and equipment which the PWDs could use and operate during the training. Training supplies and materials are always available. The trainers are highly competent and can communicate effectively even with the hearing impaired trainees.

Scholarships should be available to deserving PWDs. Transportation allowances may be provided to PWDs from low-income families. The training institution must have partnership arrangements with companies and government agencies where the PWDs could have on-the-job training and be employed after finishing the course. If the PWD opts to set up own business, post-training assistance in the form of loan packages, market linkages, technology enhancement, skills upgrading, etc. should be made available.

Above all these, the vocational training system must be anchored on a development plan for the sector and have an accurate and reliable data base on PWDs. This will serve as the guidepost for effective and responsive policy and decision-making as well as program development not only by the government but also by all other stakeholders.

The system should also be supported by a massive advocacy program aimed at encouraging the PWDs to take up the cudgel and be counted as productive members of the community. The campaign should also target the parents, the other family members and the community as a whole so that their negative perceptions about PWDs would be changed.

2. What are the barriers that prevent this from being realized?

The Philippines is faced with many challenges in addressing the skill development needs of PWDs. The first and basic concern is the lack of accurate data on PWDs – their number, nature of their disabilities, location and other

demographic data. Such data should be the basis for effective planning and implementation of vocational training programs for the sector.

The World Health Organization estimates that about 10 percent of a country's population has disabilities. With the Philippines' population of 80 million, the estimated number of PWDs should be somewhere around eight million. The census that was conducted in the Philippines in 2000, however, reported that there are only less than a million PWDs. Such discrepancy could be attributed to two main factors, namely: family members may not have divulged the information that they have a family member who is disabled and the enumerators encountered difficulty in identifying a PWD when the census was done.

Inadequacy of training facilities is the next concern. As mentioned in the earlier part of the paper, DSWD has only four vocational rehabilitation centers nationwide. With the big number of PWDs to be assisted, four training centers are definitely not enough. In the case of TESDA, there is still a need to continuously develop the capability of its trainers to effectively respond to the training needs of the visually impaired and the hearing impaired which comprise 50 percent and 13 percent, respectively of the total number of PWDs. Provision of additional equipment and other facilities and upgrading of existing ones are likewise crucial.

Accessibility of the training centers to the PWDs is another limitation. The training centers are usually located in the regional or provincial centers and are therefore beyond the reach of PWDs. The situation is further aggravated by the lack of financial resources among most of the PWDs.

One strategy being adopted by TESDA to address the limited access of PWDs to training opportunities is the conduct of training programs in community where the PWDs are located. Delivery of community based training, however, is

still being done on a very limited scale because of lack of financial resources and inadequate equipment and facilities. The limited number of personnel who are skilled in dealing with the issue on disability and who can handle training programs for PWDs hampers this furthermore.

The appropriateness of the training intervention for each type of disability may also need to be considered. In the case of the visually impaired, for example, training that is being offered is limited to massage (APT), basket making or music-related skills like playing musical instruments. Stereotyping must be avoided.

The above concerns may be simpler to manage than the social issues affecting the training of PWDs. The negative attitude of the parents and the PWDs themselves makes it even more difficult to pursue development initiatives for the sector. Bias against the PWDs among employers hinders the former's access to employment opportunities in companies.

Still another big concern is the financing of the training for PWDs. Because the country's resources are inadequate, the budget for this program is likewise inadequate.

3. What tools and techniques will realistically address the barriers that have been identified?

Realizing the need to come up with data on PWDs, the Department of Health in partnership with the NCWDP and other concerned government agencies, was tasked to lead in the registration of PWDs through the local health workers and other volunteer health personnel. Due to budgetary constraints, however, the registration has not reached a conclusive result yet and is getting more support to complete the project. On the other hand, NCWDP has in the past been fielding two items on disability in the census being done by the

National Statistics Office every five years. The census yielded low results due to definition issues. Continuous effort to enhance integration of the items in the national census is being pursued. Data on vocational training and employment of PWDs which are vital areas of concern may be included. In general, there is a need to come up with massive advocacy campaigns and to involve as many organizations, both public and private, and individuals to assist in the conduct of the census and registration.

Complementation of resources and technical expertise between the DSWD, TESDA, other national government agencies, non-government organizations, PWD organizations and the local government units is being continuously pursued to maximize the delivery of skills development programs to the PWDs. PWD leaders have been appointed/designated members of concerned government agencies' boards and committees to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs addressed. Special bodies/groups are being formed to ensure wider participation of PWDs in the planning and actual implementation of the various training programs. Annual action plans that serve as the roadmap in the development of PWDs are being prepared and implemented by the concerned groups.

Recently, the President of the Philippines issued Executive Order 417 which enjoins all government agencies and government owned and controlled corporations to support the implementation of the economic independence program for persons with disabilities. As an offshoot of this EO, a memorandum of agreement has just been signed among heads of government departments for the implementation of an integrated skills training program for PWDs.

Alongside with the government, PWD organizations and civic groups have likewise responded to the call of integrating the PWDs into the mainstream of society. They have set up their own training centers and offered training programs for PWDs. With the expanding employment opportunities in offshore

IT-related jobs such as medical transcription, encoding and call center work, these organizations offer courses along these areas which they believe the PWDs could perform well. It is worthy to note that the training being given by these organizations are directly linked with employers so that the graduates are assured of employment after graduation. Other courses being offered involve simple skills such as windows application for beginners who want to pursue college education or improve their business operations. While the government could not offer financial assistance to these organizations, agencies like TESDA and NCWDP extend technical assistance in the areas of trainers training, curriculum development, assessment and certification and other related services. In most cases, these organizations receive grants from international funding institutions.

To address the issue regarding PWDs' limited access to training opportunities, specific portions of government's scholarship program allocations have been reserved for the sector. While the slots are available for technical courses, however, experiences of TESDA have shown that availment of the scholarship is not maximized. This is mainly due to the bias among Filipinos against blue-collar occupations. The General Appropriations Act, on the other hand, has mandated the allocation of one percent (1%) of the budget of all government agencies for programs for PWDs.

In the government's effort to create awareness on PWD concerns, the President of the Philippines has mandated the observance of the National Disability Prevention and Rehabilitation Week every year. All government agencies, particularly the members of the NCWDP Governing Board, participate in the celebration and conduct various activities either individually or in partnership with others. Some of these activities are job fairs, livelihood fair, skills demonstration, and exhibits among others.

One program that has become an effective means of advocating the skills of PWDs is the Abilympics. The Abilympics is a skills competition among PWDs that is being done at local and national levels. National winners then compete in the International Abilympics where Filipino PWDs have demonstrated the best of their skills. A good feature of this program is the strong partnership among the various stakeholders involved, namely: the national government agencies (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Interior and Local Government, and National Council for the Welfare of Disabled Persons) the local government units, and the private sector (Abilympics Philippines, Inc.).

3. What should be done to move the issue forward?

The Philippines has acquired a lot of good experiences in the development of PWDs. Because of limitations in technical, financial and manpower resources, however, the country needs further assistance from its neighboring countries and international funding agencies.

To address such limitations, the following recommendations are being forwarded:

- capability building for the personnel of concerned government agencies (in particular the members of the NCWDP Board) in various areas in vocational rehabilitation (guidance and counseling, social preparation, strategic planning, managing training programs for PWDs, etc.) This could be done through conduct of in-country training programs/seminars facilitated by local and international experts, exchange programs among involved personnel, job immersion, or study tours.

- benchmarking on vocational training systems and approaches among countries (e.g. within ASEAN)
- documentation and sharing of best practices in vocational rehabilitation
- improvement of training facilities, equipment, tools and learning materials
- training of trainers on effective approaches in training PWDs
- provision of financial assistance for the conduct of training programs
- provision of financial assistance for advocacy and promotion activities