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Inauguration

Mr J D Bandaranayake commenced proceedings by stating that this workshop was organized with the objective of training and facilitating disabled persons for employment in the private sector. This initiative will be mutually beneficial to both the differently-abled job seekers and employers. A steering committee was formed with the support of ILO, of 15 member companies representing the banking, plantations, hotel industry, manufacturing and service sectors. The foundation has been laid for the success of this initiative by raising awareness and the development of a data base which includes 1500 job seekers appropriately categorized; the data base can be accessed through the EFC website. The next step is to give employers specific options about how they can provide further training and give employment opportunities for people with disabilities, giving employers an opportunity to interview screened applicants during the job fair scheduled for, later. The first session will provide useful insights into various aspects of hiring and integrating people with disabilities in to the workplace and examining the subject in the Sri Lankan context.

Ms Claudia Coenjerts
Director, ILO

Introductory Remarks

The ILO believes that today should be the start because it makes economic sense to address social issues at work.

This is an opportunity to provide decent work for all. Decent work is the mandate of ILO and an important facet of decent work is to ensure that there is no discrimination and equality of opportunity exists. Many job seekers who will visit this event do not witness equality of opportunities because they are people with disabilities. Many of them want to work but are not given the chance; they are not recognised for their talents and purchasing power which hampers the unlocking of their potential. Promoting diversity is not easy; having been a gender expert previously, similarity can be seen in promoting gender equality and the acceptance of differently-abled persons into the mainstream. Many employers may think this is an interesting aspect but their priority is to be competitive and make profit, noble causes and decent work can be considered later. The ILO believes that today should be the start because it makes economic sense to address social issues at work.

Last year, the ILO developed a code of practice and guidelines for employers in the management of disability related issues at work. Initially, it may require extra effort from employers but with conviction it can be said that, within a short time, the benefits of employing people with disabilities are multiplied. Managing a buffer workforce is more

and more recognised as a key factor in improving efficiency, productivity and overall business success; it is not necessary to consider it a welfare case. A close associate of ILO, the EFC is demonstrating how to blend social and economic goals in their programs. The initiative to launch a disabilities network involving disabled people and bringing them close to employers is noble, important and well timed. With peace on the horizon it is crucial that disabled people are given a dignified place in society and everyone must endeavour to make this initiative a success. Employers with the EFC embarked upon a difficult task a year ago and Sri Lanka is being cited internationally as a success case and that means that the expectations are high and there is a need to continue the initiative, until results are seen. At the job fair there will be ample opportunity to do so.

In conclusion Ms Coenjerts reiterated that this event is a build-up effort of a long time, involving much work. “The vision for this initiative is the EFC’s “ she said, while thanking Motivation Trust and USAID.

Dr Carrol Becker

Director, USAID

The private sector holds the key to success today and the future. The collaborative efforts of the ILO, EFC and USAID’s partner Motivation Trust are going to make this initiative for people with disabilities work in a positive way because they all have something to add to the equation and by collaborating, there is a good program; employers will be the beneficiaries. “ Two years ago, I was the Director for the Epilepsy Foundation in Washington DC where I learned a lot about disabilities because epilepsy is a hidden disability. Though symptoms cannot be seen, would-be employers will be afraid to employ someone with epilepsy because they feel they cannot cope with a seizure” explained Dr Becker. “A lot of education among employers was done about epilepsy, with people with epilepsy leading such programs. The more people get to know about such disabilities, the less afraid they are and they see special abilities in such people.”

The Epilepsy

conducted a program
new job seekers had

Awareness programs are crucial

Foundation

for young people as
particular problems –

they were not sure if they had to state on the application that they had epilepsy. Being young, they did not know how to handle a situation where, if they said they had no disability and had a seizure at work there was a chance of being fired from the job and if they said they had a disability they may never be hired. In the special program they were taught to do a resume and face an interview.

What the ILO, EFC and Motivation Trust are doing is exactly that – building the confidence of people so that they can present themselves well to employers. Employers need to ask them questions because they are being anticipated, they want to be productive employees who will be integrated into society; it is not charity they want but an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities. It is hoped that employers will be open to hiring them. Employers here are trail-blazers; as many who hire people with disabilities will make others think that they too can do the same. There will certainly be challenges in employing these people, adjustments need to be made but adjustments are made for every employee as each one has weaknesses and strengths.

It is important to talk to co-workers as they too could be unsure about how they can help. An open, transparent discussion will help them to adjust to the situation.

USAID is committed to working with people with disabilities and have been working in this field since 1991. “As many as 7000 amputees have been helped by our program but we realized that providing prosthetics and mobility exercises is not sufficient and a more holistic approach is required; Motivation Trust as a partner of USAID is doing exactly that. It is not just the body but the mind too has to be addressed and opportunities found for people with disabilities to become well adjusted citizens. It is hoped that employers present will give the job seekers such opportunities” were the concluding comments of Dr Becker.

Ms Debra Perry

Senior Specialist, Vocational Rehabilitation,
ILO, Bangkok.

“I was in Sri Lanka in 1994 when we attempted to launch a similar program together with the EFC. At that time the foundation was laid for this second effort, which proves that perseverance is required to achieve success in initiatives such as these” began Ms Perry. “The collaboration of partners for this event was impressive. The workshop was a manifestation of the hard work done by colleagues over the years.” She emphasized that this was groundbreaking, not only for Sri Lanka but for Asia and the Pacific region. People across the globe are proposing an international convention on the ‘Protection and Promotion of Rights and Dignity of People with Disabilities’. In end June 2003, there was a meeting at UN Headquarters in New York City which concluded with tremendous optimism, where a Drafting Committee was formed to draft a new UN Convention and it is expected that this convention may be adopted within 3-4 years which is record-breaking time for such a Convention. It is time for the human rights and equal rights of people with disabilities to be recognised. The Asia Pacific region has been a pioneer in this effort. In October 2002 a high level inter-governmental meeting was held in Japan to evaluate the International Decade of Disabled Persons. A big achievement at that meeting was that the governments in the region agreed to extend the decade for another 10 years because they realized the importance of the work that has to be done regarding human disabilities. Governments Lanka, unanimously Millenium Framework for inclusive rights based goal. This framework calls participation of the private employers organizations organizations to provide opportunities for people also calls for the ratification of the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment of Disabled Persons Convention of 1983, which is an ILO Convention that was passed when attitudes towards people with disabilities was different because it was considered a social welfare

Attitudes have changed and the needs and rights of people with disabilities are considered within the context of human rights and the ‘social model of disability’.

rights and people with which included Sri adopted the Morocco Action, for an society, which is the for the increased sector including and workers employment with disabilities. It

or medical issue at that time. Attitudes have changed and the needs and rights of people with disabilities are considered within the context of human rights and the ‘social model of disability’. According to this model it is not disability that causes the disadvantage that disabled people face but the social and physical environment that is not receptive to people with disabilities.

“Disability is a natural phenomena” remarked Ms Perry, “if we live long enough we will all be disabled. In most countries disability results from war, road accidents etc. We have got beyond blaming the disabled person and realizing that we need to accommodate them as we do others in society.”

The EFC is one group that has responded to these changing times and the Employers Network on Disability has reached out to other employers to collaborate, reached out to those with disabilities to tear down the barriers of exclusion and discrimination that have prevented people with disabilities to enter the economic mainstream. Besides the issue of human rights, hiring people with disabilities makes good, economic sense and most enlightened employers realize the value of human resources.

Ms V Jegarajasingham

Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare

The government passed an Act in 1996 to protect the rights of people with disabilities; a National Council was established to enact this legislature, chaired by the Minister of Social Welfare with a representative from an organization that works with disabled persons and other government officials. From 1996, the Council has worked on various programs to achieve the rights of the disabled. The ministry has been also trying to facilitate the private sector to employ people with disabilities. At present, the Ministry has placed before Parliament an amendment to the existing Act which has provision for providing accessibility to built environments; the existing Act does not allow for regulations to be implemented for the easy access of private and public buildings to the disabled. If disabled persons are to be employed, a built environment which is accessible to them has to be facilitated. It is the government’s duty to ensure that a conducive environment is created.

The Ministry of Social Welfare has been recruiting, wherever possible, persons with disabilities.

Chairperson of the Board some physical are visually recruited who employees. In

A mission of the Ministry is to get the elderly, the disabled, children and all sectors of society to contribute to national development.

“When I was Social Securities people with disabilities and who handicapped were proved to be good comparison to

normal employees it was observed that people with disabilities are more sincere, punctual and regular in attendance” was an observations made by Ms Jegarajasingham. The Ministry of Social Welfare hopes to have discussions with the Treasury regarding tax exemptions to those who employ disabled persons and allowances during training period to be shared if possible. The 13th amendment to the Constitution legislated that the

Ministry of Social Welfare would be responsible for national policies, programs, research etc. regarding disabled persons and the Provincial Councils will implement all activities. The first national policy on disabilities in Sri Lanka was formulated by the Ministry with the participation of many – persons with different disabilities participated. A mission of the Ministry is to get the elderly, the disabled, children and all sectors of society to contribute to national development. The Ministry assures that it will do whatever possible to help employers who meet with difficulties in employing disabled persons.

Mr M Jayatilake

Additional Secretary, Ministry of Employment & Labour

The formation of this network demonstrates that employers in Sri Lanka are conscious of social obligations. People with disabilities are at a disadvantage in finding employment and this initiative is commendable. People with disabilities have a right to equal opportunities and contribute to national development as they are capable of delivering good services.

The Ministry is fully committed to providing employment to people with disabilities

There is a national policy on employment and of the 7 initiatives identified therein, one is of social obligation. Under social obligations a key area identified is providing equal opportunities to disabled people. Implementation of the National Employment Policy has begun; 17 centres have been set-up nationally to deal with employment related issues which will cater to the disabled also; this aspect was seriously considered because one criteria for the selection of buildings for these centers was the accessibility by disabled persons. The fullest cooperation of the Ministry was assured.

Mr Thomas Keolker

Program Director, Motivation Charitable Trust

“There is nothing more frustrating to a disabled person than the imagined limitations people put on them” were Mr Keolker’s opening comments which caught the attention of his audience. Society’s ignorance about people with disabilities is as handicapping as the real limitations of the actual impairment. Changing society’s attitude about people with disabilities can be a slow process but it can be achieved. This is the first opportunity that so many people with disabilities have had, to show that they have the will and are able to perform as well as their able-bodied counterparts. Pity is the last thing that disabled people want, they want to be treated as equals and those offering them employment are leaders in a modernising world.

Mr Gotabaya Dassanayake

Director General, EFC

Mr Dasanayake expressed the EFC's pleasure to have given leadership in creating a network on disabilities with the objective of facilitating employment and training opportunities in the private sector for disabled job seekers. EFC's efforts are not purely in the interest of social welfare, they are in the interest of both the disabled and the employers. In Sri Lanka, 5% of the population, suffer from some form of recognised disability. It is important, from a socio-economic point of view that such a large number of persons are not marginalized from economic activity and their skills and talents productively harnessed. In the process, contribution is made to the achievement of the 'Decent Work' agenda of the ILO.

Efforts of the EFC

The draft National Employment Policy of the Ministry of Labour has recognised the need to integrate differently-abled persons into the mainstream and in that context as well, the initiative of an Employers Network on Disability is significant. EFC's efforts in this direction commenced in 1999 with the encouragement of the ILO; the EFC is thankful for the supportive role of the ILO in providing both financial and technical aid. Over the last 3 years reasonable progress has been made in awareness building through workshops and the publication of literature on the importance and benefits of bringing disabled persons in to the mainstream of economic life. A data base has also been compiled with information on 1500 disabled job seekers; this data base will be updated and accessed through the web site

of the EFC. Although it was not institutionalized through an process, the EFC has assisted in obtaining employment for a number of disabled persons.

28 member companies have confirmed that they have made a conscious decision to employ the disabled and as such it is time to work

through an institutionalized framework with employers. It is encouraging to note that even non-EFC members have shown interest in this project. "The Job Fair will be a landmark in Sri Lanka" said Mr Dasanayake.

It is important, from a socio-economic point of view that such a large number of disabled persons are not marginalized from economic activity; their skills & talents should be productively harnessed.

Appreciation was placed on record to the following – Ministry of Employment and Labour, Ministry of Social Welfare, Motivation Trust who conducted 5 training programs for 80 job seekers selected from EFC's data base and the steering committee consisting of 15 member companies which has overseen the activities of this event.

Hiring & Integrating People with Disabilities into Workplaces

Why are we here?

- To promote the hiring and inclusion of the differently-abled
- To explore the business case for hiring the disabled
- To discuss effective interview and hiring techniques related to disability

Why focus on people with disabilities; overcoming negative attitudes – International Experience

Ms Debra Perry

Afternoon Job Fair

- To bring job seekers with disabilities together with employers
- To help employers find employees with disabilities to meet labor force needs

Why Focus on People with Disabilities?

Some Facts:

- They are a large and diverse group---one that is too often ignored 5 to 20 percent of the population depending on the country but often it is underestimated
- Unemployment rates are double that of the general population and as high as 80 percent
- Disability and poverty are linked. ADB estimates that 20 percent of the world's poor are people with disabilities
- Apart from the human rights aspect, the socioeconomic costs of not integrating people with disabilities into employment is high
- They face many barriers, including negative attitudes about their abilities
- Increasingly apparent that people with disabilities can make substantial contributions eg. Dupont Study (1958-1990)
Disabled workers performed comparable to or better than non-disabled peers with regard to:

- Safety
- Attendance
- Job Performance

Reference was made to the ILO booklet “Unlocking Potential” which is a Disability Business Case which focuses on :

- ✓ A commitment to diversity
- ✓ Untapped talent
- ✓ Reduced costs related to recruitment, turnover, etc.
- ✓ Increase morale, loyalty and creativity
- ✓ Social responsibility
- ✓ Positive public relations
- ✓ Expanded customer base
- ✓ Economic and social benefits

The ILO Approach based on “Decent Work”

“Decent Work” means productive work in conditions of freedom, equity and human dignity.

ILO principles are:

1. Decent work for all women and men
2. Equal opportunities for persons with disabilities as others; this principle is embedded in :
 - ILO Convention 159: Equal treatment and opportunity
 - ILO Code of Practice for Managing Disability in the Workplace – this is not legally binding but was adopted by a tripartite group in ILO headquarters in Geneva in 2001.
3. Belief in the business case - hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense

All participants were requested to write down a concern they may have about employing a disabled person and handover, so that they could be addressed by the organizers.

Video Presentation

AbilityAsia was produced with employers, for employers. Its duration is approximately 30 minutes; it is filmed in four countries including Sri Lanka . The purpose of this video film is to promote positive attitudes and begin to describe ways to integrate people with disabilities into the workplace.

A participatory discussion of the video took place, followed by addressing some of the concerns noted down.

Panel Discussion - The Sri Lankan Experience

Moderator : Dr Padmini Mendis

Employment Status of people with Disabilities

Sqd. Ldr Cyril Siriwardena

Secretary General, Disabilities Organisations Joint Front
Project Officer, Motivation Trust

“It is hard for people with disabilities to find employment in Sri Lanka because society looks at the disability and does not even consider their abilities” was the discerning comment made by Sq. Ldr Siriwardena.

Some factors that deter the employment of disabled persons:

- Belief that a disabled person’s productivity is low

Employers tend to think that the productivity of a disabled person is lower than an able person, whereas it has been observed by many, that a disabled person’s productivity is higher.

- Fear of high cost to employer

Many think that adapting work stations and modifying equipment to accommodate a disabled person is high but it is not necessarily so. Sqd. Ldr. Siriwardene gave a personal example of modifications to his work place and living quarters costing only Rs 1,000/- when he was disabled in 1980.

- No incentives to employ the disabled

There are tax exemptions given to companies. Organizations that hire disabled persons are recognised by the government.

- Lack of opportunities to acquire skills, knowledge and work attitudes for a specific job

Vocational training centers in Sri Lanka do not train the disabled to be suitable for mainstream employment.

- Lack of education to accept co-workers who have disabilities

Make them more aware of abilities of these people. 51 disabled people attended the Asian Games for the Disabled and returned to Sri Lanka with 25 medals whereas the able bodied team won only 6 medals.

- Attitudinal change in society about integrating the disabled into the mainstream, Convince society that disabled people too need to earn a living with dignity;

How to facilitate the employment of disabled persons:

1. A disabled person could be employed for a probation period of six months and assess their productivity.
2. Establish a resource center with information for employers on low cost adaptation to work places.
3. Provide incentive schemes to employers
4. Provide suitable training / include the disabled in work education programs
5. Publicize success stories about disabled employees

Employee's Perspective

Ms Manique Gunaratne

EFC

“When I first joined the EFC as a trainee telephone operator soon after the Disabilities Network was launched, I was wondering whether I would be able to live up to expectations. Driven by a fierce desire to reciprocate the confidence of the EFC when they recruited me, I strove for excellence. The job is demanding. To improve efficacy all telephone calls to member companies are channeled through the switch-board and as such, it is very busy and I meet this challenge daily. My perseverance has been rewarded with a voice activated computer and a scanner which enables me to perform duties on many software programs.” Ms Gunaratne proudly announced, “There are no complaints but compliments.”

“In 2002, I was selected to represent Sri Lanka at a leadership development workshop in India organized by the World Blind Union and Asian Blind Union. After a good childhood and exceptionally good educational background and experience in two leading organizations in the private sector I became visually impaired 3 years ago but am equally capable as someone with sight.” A special request was made to employers present to have confidence in disabled persons and give them a chance to see amazing results.

Employers' Perspective

Mr Jayantha Fernando

Director , Shipping, Mlesna Ceylon Ltd.

Mlesna a tea company is engaged in packing and exporting tea to approximately 50 countries and retail sales in the local market are done through 18 outlets. The company began small in 1983; in 1988 a NGO working with blind people requested Mlesna to employ some visually impaired youth. 10 of them were recruited and a training period began. At that time, Mlesna's working area was congested with tea chests and packaging material but within a few weeks they learnt to move around this area without difficulty. Mr Fernando showed some samples of cloth bags, that tea is packed in and explained to the audience what is done by the visually impaired which was amazing. Depending on their abilities, work was allocated and often their output was better than the normal employees'. They progress fast because of their keenness to learn the work. When disabled persons stop employment, it has been noticed that they always follow the correct procedure. They are never absent unless there is a valid reason like sickness. One major obstacle faced by disabled workers is finding boarding houses, for those whose families live in villages. These visually impaired youth are trained to count teabags and pack them. When random checking is done by supervisors, no mistakes have ever been found. Mr Fernando emphasized that it was a blessing to have these people in employment.

Jamshid Sourjah

General Manager, Hameedias

Mr Sourjah thanked the organizers for recognizing Hameedias for an initiative they had pioneered. In 1999, Hameedias was thinking of a meaningful way to celebrate 50 years in business and the noble idea of giving employment to a segment of Sri Lanka's underprivileged society emerged. With the assistance of the Department of Social Services, MTV network and hotel Taj Samudra, an exhibition titled "We are family" was held with the objective of focusing on the differently abled and integrating them with society. Hameedias derived great joy from this project and received much support from the media. It was an achievement that the staff and business partners showed great interest in the project. It was the correct platform to project these people as differently-abled and not disabled; the idea of mooting for ramps in every new building constructed in the future first came up at this event. Meaningful alliances with business partners were established at this event and many differently-abled persons received confirmed orders for their products; all participants at the event received sponsorship for social insurance through the intervention of Hameedias.

A new project for the teaching and caring of the differently-abled has been embarked upon by Hameedias today. "There are many who are lame and with hearing impairments

employed in our establishment and we have had a great experience with them” said Mr Sourjah. In screening and finding suitable candidates for recruitment, Hameedias has found the School for the Hearing Impaired a great help, as they knew the candidates intimately. Everyone recommended by them has been a success and only those who had problems finding accommodation have left their posts. The interviews were conducted with the help of teachers and the way these candidates helped each other was impressive; there was no obvious competition as is common among the normal people, they were happy for whoever got the job. Another observation made was, that they wanted to hear the outcome of the interview immediately and the time of these announcements are quite emotional.

While working with them it was noticed that they do not mind any reference to their impairment; they like to be appreciated and asked for assistance. They pay keen attention and ask for clarification to ensure that they do the job well. All of them are punctual and neat. It is preferred to have more than one disabled person working in an establishment as the employees feel more comfortable. One impediment that should be addressed is the availability of translators at reasonable rates.

“We owe much to society from whom we become rich and famous and this is one segment of that community that needs assistance, if you are personally unable to employ a differently-abled person, you should strive to support such projects” Mr Sourjah commented with the plea not to only look at what a disabled person can do for you but what you can do to offer someone encouragement to whom God has given less talents. A story was related to illustrate the importance of disability. A child without arms asked God why he was born so and God told him that only he can tell his brothers how lucky they are to have arms; God also told him, “you are my beloved child who will be blessed in heaven for carrying out my mission on earth.”

Plenary:

- Many employers have reservations about hiring disabled persons because they wonder about accessibility to public transport and punctuality. What is your experience?

Most of Mlesna’s employees are from rural areas and they are boarded close to the factory and are punctual.

It is our experience that they come a minimum of ½ hour before time.

A visually impaired person in my organization told me that rising early and traveling to work was not a problem to him because darkness was not a problem.

- What is meant by mainstream jobs?

To be employed in a normal place of work, integrating with normal people. There are sheltered workshops where only the disabled work and that is not what was referred to.

- There seems to be a lack of awareness in society and among employers about this hidden section of our community and awareness raising seems to be the priority.

If the government can help to bring disabled people into the mainstream with legislation what specifically should it be? Should it be a law that says it is illegal to discriminate against a disabled person or should the law provide tax incentives or should there be a quota system where the law states that any large employer is liable to employ a percentage of disabled people?

I had experience in hiring a disabled person where after some years he demanded for special transport from his employers; the government should have some laws to protect employers as well.

The first step is not employing the disabled but creating an environment where such a person will be accepted by co-workers. Without their support a disabled person will not be able to perform well. Before tax incentives are offered Sri Lanka needs buildings with ramps, toilets and cinemas that can accommodate a wheelchair, vehicles that will accommodate people in wheelchairs easily. It is only then, that society will accept them as part of the community.

It is more effective to have disabled persons employed by persuasion rather than by legal measures. To strengthen this, there is a national policy, yet in draft form clarifying strategies that can be used to support employers who recruit people with disabilities; Sri Lanka already has legislation regarding non-discrimination of disabled persons in employment; there is a quota system applicable to the public sector specifying the employment of 3% disabled workers which does not function. Legislation nor quota system has not worked well in other countries too and that is why ILO has decided to use other strategies such as persuasion and conviction.

Interviewing and Hiring People with Disabilities

Moderator : Mr Anver Dole
Director, CEI Plastics

What is the challenge for Human Resource vis a vis social responsibility issues? There is an important balancing issue to be regarded i.e. balancing between the

business imperative and social responsibility issue. Are these two ends of a continuum or can these be fused? The business aspect should be considered in social responsibility. Though it has emerged as a high priority in business philosophy. 'Global Compact' is a concept promoted by the UN to instill social responsibility in business philosophy; one principle is to avoid discrimination in the workplace which must include the disabled.

Review of Basic Interview Skills & how they relate to People with Disabilities

Mr M Harees
Senior Manager HRD, Commercial Bank

Different approaches to social responsibility

One approach says the only responsibility is to the organization - to make profit, which is the primary objective; this is an extreme approach.

There is another called the 'Charity Principle' where an organization has a duty to consider disadvantaged segments of society.

'Stewardship Principle' states that organizations have a duty to help society because the rich have been vested with wealth, in trust, to use it for the good of society.

The more recent approach is the 'Enlightened self-interest View'. The organization realizes that it is in their own interest to be socially responsible towards communities.

What do we need to do from an organizational point of view?

- Dispel negative thoughts about people with disabilities.
- Top management has to be committed to integrating disabled persons to mainstream employment.

Common Constraints

The disabled do not possess employable skills

Disability does not mean inability

Points to remember when Interviewing:

- ✓ It cannot be done in the same manner as with normal people. The interviewer should adapt themselves to relate and empathise with the candidate
- ✓ Need to understand their specific disability
- ✓ Focus on what their abilities are, before talking of their disability.
- ✓ A genuine desire to help will result in the interviewer being supportive

Special issues involved in Interviewing a Person with Disability and Disability Etiquette

Ms Debra Perry

1. Use sound human resource practices which will be shown to any job applicant
2. Identify what needs to be done (job analysis and job descriptions)
3. Ensure an equitable process to advertise, select, interview, orient and manage

Preparation

- Review the job analysis, description and requirements. Do they unnecessarily discriminate? What are the key or essential functions of the job?
- Employ special recruitment techniques
- Prepare for accommodations or adjustments in the selection process as well as on the job
- Assess accessibility (Do not confuse access with wheelchairs---consider the need for writing, an interpreter, etc.)

The Interview Situation

- Ask short-listed candidates if they have particular needs or requirements (e.g., interpreter, check for accessibility, etc.)
- Treat the interviewee like you would any other applicant---with dignity and respect
- Try to make him or her comfortable
- Recognize your discomfort, if any

Greeting the Applicant

- First experiences can cause anxiety
- Knowing some disability etiquette helps
- Relax and be yourself
- Shake hands
- Don't be afraid to say things like, "see you soon" to a blind person

Asking Questions

- ✓ Ask about experience and ability to do the job and its tasks
- ✓ Avoid unnecessary questions that do not relate to the job and the applicant's ability to do
- ✓ Ask the applicant if he she has any condition that will affect his or her ability to do the job and if so, what accommodations are needed
- ✓ Avoid making assumptions about the person's abilities

Communication Tips

- Talk directly to the person, even if you are using an interpreter
- Offer assistance by asking first and then waiting for instructions
- Remember that wheelchairs are part of a persons 'personal space'
- Use acceptable terms like people with disabilities rather than handicapped; Deaf and without speech, rather than "Deaf and dumb"
- Consult people with disabilities

Applications and Tests

- ❖ People with certain types of disabilities may have problems with applications and tests
- ❖ Be willing to make adjustments such as reading tests, having material put in Braille or large print, offering more time, etc.

Decision Making

- I. Consider all the persons skills and life experience
- II. Factor in accommodations
- III. Remove nonessential functions if they will preclude the person doing the job
- IV. Talk to the applicant about doubts or assumptions
- V. Talk to other employers who have had similar experiences
- VI. Get support from disability employment specialists
- VII. Consider health and safety issues

Making Adjustments: Barriers and Difficulties Faced

- a. Getting to work and getting to work on time (Transport)
- b. Getting inside and moving around the workplace (Physical Accessibility)
- c. Using equipment tools and machinery necessary to perform work
- d. Communicating with supervisors, co-workers, and clients
- e. Fitting in and making friends (Social)

Adjustment Depends on:

- The individual
- The nature of the disability
- The job demands and requirements
- The work environment

Making Accommodations and Adjustments

Accommodate the disabled employee and if appropriate include the workers representative in discussions regarding:

- a. The culture
- b. The workplace and physical environment
- c. The job (Duties, hours, etc.)
- d. Supervisors and Co-workers

Accommodations: Examples

1. Making the facility accessible (e.g., adding a ramp, improved signage)
2. Restructuring a job (e.g., giving a marginal function to another staff member)
3. Altering when or how a job is performed (e.g., completing a task sitting instead of standing)
4. Offering a different work schedule (e.g., different work hours to access transportation)
5. Obtaining special equipment or devices or modifying existing ones
6. Providing special support measures (e.g., additional training time for slow learner)

7. Reassigning a worker to a new or vacant job (e.g., an injured worker to a less physically demanding job)
8. Offering different modes of communication (e.g., writing or demonstrating for Deaf persons, or providing Braille labels or better signage for visually impaired)

Accommodations: Costs

- No or negligible costs for many
- E.g. Sears and Roebucks, which hires 20,000 disabled people found that 97% of adjustments cost little or no money (1972-1992)
- Many adjustments can benefit other employees or customers (e.g. ramps, better signage, uncluttered corridors)
- Some governments offer financial or tax incentives

Other Workplace Measures that will helping accommodation:

- ✓ Mentoring
- ✓ Buddy System
- ✓ Disability Awareness Training
- ✓ Company Policy/Strategy
- ✓ See ILO Code of Practice for Managing Disability in the Workplace

Managing Workers with Disabilities

- I. Follow principles of equal treatment and opportunity
- II. Treat people with disabilities as you would any employee
- III. Provides tools and training needed to do the job
- IV. Consider workers with disabilities for training, promotion and all job benefits
- V. Give positive and negative feedback
- VI. Seek out NGOs and disability specialists if a problem arises

Additional Guidance from:

1. ILO Code of Practice for Managing Disability in the Workplace
2. ILO web sites - <http://ilo.org>, <http://ilo.org/abilityasia>
3. Employers Federation
4. Other employers
5. NGOs and government agencies
6. Disabled persons and their organizations

Plenary:

- If an employer hires a person with disabilities what kind of support can the Ministry of Social Welfare, Motivation Trust and EFC offer them if they face difficulties or need assistance about working with such a person?

Motivation Trust (MT)

MT has been working for 14 years mostly with people with mobility disabilities and is still in the learning stage of employment placement. MT's role has been in training people with disabilities in job seeking skills and identifying job positions they could acquire and maintain. The database that the EFC has developed will be updated and maintained by MT and made available to employers. All people in the data base will be trained in job seeking skills and where resources are available they will be trained in leadership etc. There will be a procedure where employers who face any problems can approach MT through the EFC and MT will obtain the necessary advise and information required. Suggestions on how to improve the services of MT by employers will be welcome.

EFC

The EFC has formed a network with the Department of Social Services and Motivation Trust . Once a disabled person is employed, if there may be issues in integrating that person into the workplace EFC could be contacted - MT hopes to sign agreements with the many NGOs who work with the disabled; these NGOs will come to the workplace to help employers to integrate the disabled employees, which is a great support service offered by the network. The other, is the data base maintained by the network, where suitable candidates will be selected for employers who give specifications of their requirements. There is an officer from the Dept. of Social Services who is already attached to the network, who will visit companies which employ disabled persons to assist and guide employers.

Ministry of Social Welfare

The proposed policy document which has been submitted to Parliament has the clause that an enabling environment will be created for employers for accepting people with disabilities in their workforce by providing them with incentives; disability will be a module in workers' education to change attitudes of coworkers etc. Once it is approved by the Cabinet of Ministers it will be a national policy.

- It has been observed that there is a shortage of sign language interpreters and it is costly to get their services.

Motivation Trust together with the EFC will soon start a training program for HR managers in sign language which opportunity should be made use of all HR managers who are committed to communicating with hearing and speech impaired employees.

The Joint Front of disabled persons which consists of physically disabled persons, visually and hearing impaired, parents of such disabled children who can offer advise on

how to adapt work stations and make them accessible. Braille translations for the visually impaired can also be undertaken by the volunteers of this organization.

- If disabled persons do not have employable skills they could be provided with ‘on the job’ training to make them employable which is a viable alternative to employing them immediately.
- The national policy covers many aspects. The 1996 Act was not effective for various reasons – it may be because it is not monitored or because people do not have faith in the system. The national policy referred to has no statutory powers; how can it ensure that mainstreaming the disabled into our lives will be effective, will be monitored when it is not required by law?

Response by the Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare

Initially, a national policy is required for any subject. Powers will be delegated to the EFC to do the monitoring; the Ministry cannot be solely responsible for mainstreaming the disabled, the cooperation of many are required and the policy has been drafted likewise, in collaboration with line Ministries and international NGOs.

There is a provision for disabled persons to go to courts if there is no access to public buildings but so far no one has taken the government to courts. The State is now trying to educate the Municipalities, Provincial Councils about barrier free environment for the disabled. As soon as the amendment is passed by the Parliament, a manual with guidelines will be made available for construction purposes.

There is a 21 member council established by the Ministry to monitor this work of whom 11 members are disabled or working closely with the disabled. This council has not met officially due to a delay by the President in approving nominations but the work continues. At the moment housing assistance is being given to the disabled; a person owning land is given Rs 50,000 as a grant to build a house. There are many other ways in which the Ministry is extending assistance to provide basic needs to the disabled. Even before the Act was legislated, from as far back as 1995 the government together with NGOs has been working to improve the living standards of the disabled and allocating funds for such activities. Eg. The income from the Lotteries Board is for work with the disabled. The government has Rs 50 million for construction of houses for the disabled, there is a Trust Fund for the visually handicapped, there is a self-employment assistance scheme and many other good works going on which is not known by the general public.

The Job Fair

28 companies from the private sector participated in this unique event, the first in South East Asia. Individual stations were constructed in a large area of the hotel; these stations were numbered and name boards of companies occupying them were displayed with 2 – 3 officers from their human resource departments ready to begin interviews.

There was great excitement in another area of the hotel where 75 differently-abled youth had gathered. They all had professional curriculum vitae done by Motivation Trust and they were also trained on how to conduct themselves at an interview. There were the physically handicapped, some being helped on their wheel-chairs, there were the hearing and speech impaired with interpreters and the visually impaired with their white canes. The potential employers gave the specifications required for the job vacancies they hoped to fill, the organizers did a quick match with the personnel data and asked suitable candidates to report to the station identified by number. It was a bee-hive of activity; the candidates going for as many interviews as possible and the interviewers showing great commitment to the cause by providing them with experience in facing interviews and trying to recruit whoever they could. There were many employers who found suitable employees; some were requested to present themselves for further interviews and some were asked to report to work.

Each interviewee had a form which had to be filled in by anyone who interviewed them and the interviewers too kept a record which they handed over to the organizers at the end of the event which gave them an idea of the progress made.

Reporting on the Ground Situation

31 year old Abigail De Lile was hoping to find a job as an office assistant. She spoke good English and informed me that she started losing her sight when she was 14 years and as a result studied only upto Grade 9. She attributed this disability to her parents being first cousins. She had undergone one year's training as a telephone operator at the Sri Lanka Federation of the Visually Handicapped. At the time of reporting there was no one who had found her suitable but she was hopeful.

Bodyline, a subsidiary of the prestigious MAS Holdings was looking for a Quality Inspector who was a CAD operator; they were prepared to provide 'on the job' training and were pleased they had found two suitable candidates.

Young Rajeeva Perera who is just 22 years and has a speech impairment has had computer training for 1 ½ years at the Sun Flower Village, an institution that trains disabled youth. He was fortunate that the HR Manager of Commercial Bank found him

suitable after an intense interview and employed him immediately as a cashier in the Bank.

Officials from Watawala plantations informed that they had no specific vacancies but their interviews were structured to find out the aspirations of the candidates. They had certain reservations about the infrastructure required to employ the disabled but were confident that they could begin with hearing impaired youth in the tea packaging division.

Sri Lankan Airlines were enthusiastic about finding packers for ear-phones, air craft cleaners and computer operators for whom they would provide 'on the job' training. There were a few they had identified like 22 year old Asanka Koralage, who spoke good English and whose vision was failing due to a congenital disease, whom they had called for further interviews.

Officials of Galadari Hotel were content with the choices made after interviewing many candidates, as hotel employment seemed to hold the same glamour to all youth. They offered jobs to a security guard, a room maid and a florist and made three people very happy that day.

The visit of the Hon. Mahinda Samarasinghe, Minister for Employment and Labour was a highlight of the afternoon. The Minister visited the interview stations but spent more time talking with the differently-abled youth, offering them encouragement.

Closing Session

Moderator : Mr Gotabaya Dasanayake

Mr Dasanayaka commented that from a cursory glance at the outcome of the day that he was happy with the results because there were some who had been immediately employed and a large number who had been called up for further interviews. He urged those present to comment on the proceedings so that improvement could take place.

Employers' Impressions

- I conducted 8 interviews and found that the distance between their homes and workplace posed a problem. If a similar program is held district-wise where companies located in those areas could interview candidates living in the district might be helpful.
- There was some confusion at the beginning of the interviews because candidates who did not have the qualifications asked for, were sent to us which caused some awkwardness. That part of the process could have been streamlined more as it was the most important part of the day.

- There should be more space for interviewers to write remarks on, in the forms given.

ILO Impressions

- If an employer wants to interview an applicant for the second time, what would be the procedure to follow? Do they contact the EFC?
A single point of contact would be useful for employers, who should that be?

The EFC will be the point of contact. The employers should contact the EFC who will then provide the necessary information.

Many employers have shared that the job seekers faced their interviews well and were positive about their desire to work. It would be good to hear the impressions of the job seekers.

Impressions of Job Applicants

It was encouraging to see applicant after applicant voicing their appreciation about the job seeking skills, training to face an interview and the opportunity to meet employers they received through the Job Fair. Here are a few examples:

- A visually impaired young man while thanking the organizers, appealed to them to pay extra attention to the totally blind as it was increasingly difficult to find employment. This young man passed the GCE (Advanced Level) with four As and soon after started to lose his sight. Despite this set-back he completed his degree in Commerce and got a teaching appointment but due to the progressive nature of his illness he could not proceed with teaching and has been unemployed for some time.
- There was a differently-abled person who expressed his thanks to the organizers for giving him his first experience in facing a job interview. He stated that it gave him confidence and hope in the future.
- There was a young woman who remarked that on her 'own steam' she would never have been able to even approach any of these prestigious organizations represented at the Job Fair. The very fact that she was interviewed by them has given her confidence.

Comments from the floor

- Details of some of these applicants could be passed on to colleagues who may need their services; such details are even published in the EFC newsletters for the information of any potential employers.

In conclusion, **Ms Perry** thanked the EFC and Motivation Trust for their commitment in organizing this unique event; the employers for the encouragement extended and the job seekers were asked to make use of their new-found job seeking skills and confidence to persevere if they were not chosen at this even.