

Integration of Trainees with Disabilities into Skills Development Training Programmes:

Sri Lanka---Taking First Steps

Introduction

The Ministry of Vocational Training, Skills Development and Technical Education has expressed its intention to make its training programmes available and accessible to people with disabilities. The goal of integrating its system fully, appropriately and effectively is a long term effort that requires a major policy shift and systems change. In this region, Australia and its Bridging Pathways programme offers an example of the political will, policy shift and practical measures that must be instituted to fully implement such an initiative.

Sri Lanka can take smaller steps to begin the process and to gain experience with the issues related to the integration of trainees with disabilities into its formal and informal vocational training system. This brief paper, prepared at the request of the Secretary Ministry of Vocational Training, Skills Development and Technical Education, Sri Lanka, is designed to identify a framework of action for starting such a process. It recognizes the desire to take some initial action but also strongly urges that the proper planning and partnerships are established to ensure that initial efforts are successful. Further, it suggests that a long-term effort will require a major policy and implementation initiative that must include adequate resources.

The paper is based on ILO principles of equal treatment and equal opportunity, occupations choice, use of mainstream services for people with disabilities and other issues as outlined in ILO Convention No. 159 dealing with vocational rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, its accompanying Recommendation No. 168 and ILO Convention No. 142 on human resource development and its accompanying Recommendation 195. Further, the current international standard with regard to providing employment and training services for disabled persons is based on a social model of disability, in which disabled persons are understood to be disadvantaged largely due to an unresponsive environment and society, rather than their disability status. In other words, it proposes that if society changes---attitudes, systems, practices---people with disabilities can participate on equal footing with others.

Addressing Barriers---Gender Implications

Women and men with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing training and therefore employment. A long-term initiative to fully integrate persons with all types of disabilities into mainstream training should address all the barriers. At the same time, emphasis on gender equity should receive special attention in view of the fact that women with disabilities are faced with multiple barriers related to poverty, disability and gender. These multiple barriers result in severe social exclusion and discrimination---beyond that faced by males with disabilities or nondisabled females.

Addressing the barriers and providing appropriate interventions will require actions on the policy, fiscal, human resource development and practical levels, all of which will need to be monitored and evaluated. The following is a list of activities that could be initiated almost immediately to begin to integrate trainees with disabilities in selected training programmes or centers.

It is critical that people with disabilities be included in all steps; that employer and trade unions are engaged to guide and facilitate the process; and that experienced trainers provide input as well.

Short-Term Approaches (Immediate up to the next 6-8 months, depending on length of training programmes selected)

Get help: Establish a structure for beginning the process

Help can come from national experts in the Ministry of Vocational Training, Skills Development and Technical Education and others such as, NGOs, disabled persons and disabled persons organizations (DPOs), employers, current providers of training for people with disabilities and technical experts. See attachment 1 for a list of suggested groups/individuals. Additionally, the following steps are recommended:

- Establish an advisory group. When Australia decided to address the low participation rate of trainees with disabilities in its mainstream training centres, it established the Australian Disability Training Advisory Council. A similar group should be organized by the Ministry of Vocational Training, Skills Development and Technical Education and include representatives as noted above, being sure to include experienced training providers.
- Identify a focal point in the Ministry to deal with the issues of access of disabled persons to, and their successful participation in, vocational training. This focal point person should be high in the administrative ladder if the issue is to be perceived as important and to ensure like participation from leaders in other organizations/ministries.
- Assess technical needs of pilot implementers, such as administrators, trainers, etc. Determine on an ongoing basis what technical inputs are needed and whether or not these can be found in Sri Lanka or will require international expertise.

Get Data: Obtain baseline data

A comprehensive needs assessment can be done at a later date, along with a review of the current and emerging skills requirements in the labour market to guide longer term action and planning. The purpose of gathering some initial data is to find out if or is not happening already with regard to inclusion, to identify the skills interests of people with disabilities, and to gather information on the skills requirements of current job vacancies. The following steps are recommended:

- Find out about the current participation rates of trainees with different types of disabilities, male and female, in Ministry and related training programmes. What fields, are they being trained in, with what outcomes? It is possible that

no such data is kept except in training programmes specifically designed to serve people with disabilities, and that the data will need to be compiled.

- Find out who is interested in the issue beyond those recruited for the advisory group. Determine who in the skills development and vocational training system are most interested in this issue. Which instructors or centers have taken initiatives on their own? For those people with disabilities currently receiving training – how did they access the system in spite of barriers or the lack of a special programme? It is good to look at these success cases to see what works and how barriers have been overcome.
- Find out what skills people with disabilities want to learn. What are the areas of training that interest them most? Are these interests supported by opportunities for employment? What are the current capacities of women and men with disabilities for undertaking training? This type of analysis would not be a formal training needs assessment but could be done through brief surveys or discussions with disabled peoples' organizations to gather information to form the basis of some immediate actions.
- Find out what skills are in demand in the labour market, currently and in the foreseeable future, so that people with disabilities can be informed about the job prospects associated with different training courses.

Get Started: Design and implement a small pilot project

Even a small pilot project will need to have the basic components of a larger scale initiative. However, a simple pilot can have the benefit of providing experience without a major initiative or financial outlay. Such an effort could be initiated with relatively limited financial and human resources. Here are some steps to take:

- Identify a training center(s), target training area(s), interested instructors and interested disabled individuals, both women and men. The extent of this pilot effort will depend on the resources available and the interest and inputs from the first two activities---getting help and getting data. (It is critical to do this in consultation with persons having different types of disabilities and not to make assumptions about what disabled people can and cannot do, which may appear discriminatory.)
- Identify the most significant barriers to successful integration in the target setting and how they can be addressed. These may include physical access barriers, administrative procedures, equipment issues and academic qualification criteria among others.
- Decide on an approach---are separate classes for a particular group required within the generic system or can selected trainees be integrated into existing classes? Enterprise based training or using community based and mobile units as well as the more formal institution based approaches should also be considered.
- Determine accessibility/adaptation needs of the individual trainees. Physically disabled trainees, with adequate qualifications, might be most easily integrated as long as their mobility requirements are met. For example, certain trainees in wheelchairs may be easily integrated if targeted classes are on the ground floor and toilet facilities are accessible. Those with other types of mobility disabilities may not need adapted toilet facilities. A separate class for deaf trainees who require the use of a sign language interpreter might be organized

for deaf trainees interested in a similar topic or by grouping them in classes according to interest to minimize the expense of the sign language interpreter. Blind and visually impaired trainees may require Braille materials, information in electronic format or adaptive equipment. Integrating those with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities should not be overlooked—but they may be more easily integrated on the basis of good practice examples in other countries after some initial success in integrating individuals with other types of disabilities.

- Provide disability awareness training to instructors with the support of local disability organizations and others. Make available fact sheets on the training-related requirements of people with different disability types.
- Identify other barriers that may need to be overcome to provide training and support services within the context of training.
- Work with organizations of and for persons with disabilities to identify appropriate trainees for the initial demonstration training, so as to ensure success.
- Involve employers or an employers' organization in advising on the specific skills training likely to lead to jobs, and in arranging for on-the-job-training or work experience.
- Make arrangements to provide adequate counseling and guidance to disabled trainees.
- Make provisions for support during training by an NGO or social service agency, to assist the trainees with disabilities succeed and to enable trainers to resolve any difficulties which may arise.
- Refer trainees to appropriate employment services after training.
- Assess the success of the pilot training and identify lessons learned. Evaluate outcomes. Use this information in long-term planning for a more comprehensive programme.

Begin Planning for the Medium and Long-Term

Funding. Careful planning for successful outcomes is crucial to ongoing success of such a pilot initiative. Planning for a larger programme may necessitate preparing a budget request for the Government or a funding proposal for a donor. Consideration should be given at this early stage of how funding for the initiative might become part of the Ministry's budget once the pilot testing is completed.

Policy. Within the advisory group, determine how to implement the national disability policy that has already been approved and how it relates to skills development. Promote its implementation on an immediate basis whenever possible. For example, enforce a requirement that accessibility standards guide the design and construction of all new buildings, mobile units and other training venues to make them accessible to people with disabilities. Undertake a strategic planning process to address other policy initiatives and needs, such as legislative measures to facilitate mainstream training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. Without long-term policies and legislation, and the tools to implement them, the initiative will probably not be sustained.

Medium Term (One to three years)

The next phase should involve developing a long-term initiative and the tools to implement it. This could include:

- Formalize the training advisory group.
- Conduct a large-scale baseline and needs assessment of the training needs of disabled persons and barriers faced by them, the training needs of instructors to most effectively include disabled trainees in their training programmes, and the systemic and policy needs that will underlay successful implementation of mainstream training. Determine baseline data against which the subsequent policies, practices and outcomes can be evaluated.
- Use of the needs assessment, the labour market information on skills requirements and experience of the pilot initiative to design a large scale programme that goes beyond a few sites and a few disabled trainees to determine how to most effectively address barriers encountered and what long-term actions are required.
- Develop and implement effective policies including affirmative action measures, especially concerning access to mainstream training for female trainees with disabilities.
- Develop an appropriate evaluation mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the training provided and positive employment outcomes.
- Secure the human and financial resources to implement these measures.

Long Term (Three to ten years)

Eventually a programme needs to be institutionalized. Some of the steps that need to be taken to ensure the long-term goals of ensuring that people with disabilities have long-term access to skills development programmes include the following:

- Develop a comprehensive policy approach to integrating trainees with disabilities in the mainstream skills development systems in the country.
- Develop an assistive technology resource centre within an appropriate Government department to address the needs for assistive devices and to share ideas and information on techniques for job accommodation.
- Make all training centres accessible with regard to the physical accessibility of the built environment and communication needs of all trainees.
- Integrate vocational special needs (policy and practices for training people with disabilities), rehabilitation engineering, universal design and construction of barrier-free environments into the core curricula of related professional and college-level training programmes.
- Provide continuous in-service training to vocational instructors on disability issues, the specific needs of trainees having different types of disabilities, latest developments in adaptive technology and equipment, among other topics.
- Provide specialized training programmes for those who are most severely disabled.

- Provide specially trained counselors and resource persons for disabled students. (This practice is followed in many countries that have taken a serious approach to integrating students with disabilities.)
- Provide supports to trainers in the form of training assistants or specialist advice.
- Provide remedial programmes for students with disabilities (and others) who have been denied access to education and therefore may not meet the qualifications for entry into mainstream skills training courses.
- Link with education systems and academic institutions to assist students with disabilities bridge the gap from school to vocational training institutions and work.

Attachment 1: Suggested members of the Advisory Group

- Ministry of Vocational Training, Skills Development and Technical Education: Heads of relevant divisions and institutions (TVEC, VTA, NAITA, NITE SL, DTET, YEN), which come within the Ministry
- Ministry of Labour Relations and Foreign Employment, including JobsNet
- Ministry of Women Empowerment and Social Welfare
- Ministry of Youth Affairs
- Ministry of Samurdhi
- People who have disability, their organizations and advocates, including the United Front
- Employers Federation of Ceylon
- Trade unions
- Larger NGOs doing vocational training, such as Agromart and World University Service of Canada; and those with particular expertise in disability
- Experts and consultants, such as Ms. Padmani Mendis

Attachment 2: Useful Web sites

Accessibility

United States Access Board

<http://www.access-board.gov/indexes/accessindex.htm>

International Commission on Technology and Accessibility

www.ictaglobal.org/

Assistive Technology and Learning Adaptations

Adaptive Technology Resource Center, Canada

<http://www.utoronto.ca/atrc/>

Global Assistive Technology Explorer

<http://www.assistivetech.net>

Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Center of North America

<http://resna.org>

Vocational Aids and Resource Center operated by the Hong Kong Vocational Training Council

<http://www.vtc.edu.hk/vtds/tarc/2-53.htm>

Australian Context: Policy and Practice

Australian National Training Authority: Bridging Pathways

<http://www.anta.gov.au/dapbridging.asp>

General Research

Center for International Rehabilitation Research Information and Exchange, United States

<http://www.cirrie.buffalo.edu>