

Moving Towards Disability Inclusion

Ethiopia

Mainstreaming disability in the law curriculum at the university

Introducing a disability perspective into a law curriculum helps provide a more comprehensive basic education for all students and expands understanding of diversity for both faculty and students. The ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme's PEPDEL project works with the Faculty of Law at the University of Addis Ababa to include consideration of disability rights in the law curriculum. Over the long term, this will help to ensure that future generations of lawyers and judges will routinely consider the impact of their work on disabled people and improve possibilities for creating legal frameworks that promote full inclusion in the open labour market.



About the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme

The ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme supports two disability specific projects. The Promoting the Employability and Employment of People with Disabilities through Effective Legislation, or PEPDEL, project supports governments in improving disability-related laws and policies. The Promoting Decent Work for People with Disabilities through a Disability Inclusion Support Service, or INCLUDE, project works to build capacity at regional and national levels to effectively support equal access of persons with disabilities to training, employment services, entrepreneurship and business development services and micro-finance. Both projects operate in selected countries of South-East Asia and East and Southern Africa.

Ethiopia

The challenge

The past two decades have produced a dramatic shift away from viewing persons with disabilities as "objects" of protection, treatment and assistance to recognizing them as individuals with rights. This shift to a human rights perspective requires a review of the social and physical environment that constrains the participation of disabled persons in society. It also necessitates an assessment of national laws and policies to ensure that disability rights issues are taken into account and that they advance equal opportunities for people with disabilities. Developing an active interest in disability among future generations of lawyers and judges who one day will be responsible for promoting and protecting human rights is vital to achieving the aspirations enshrined in international instruments and conventions such as the ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), No. 159, and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Towards this aim, institutions of higher learning are strategic partners in the process of change.

Meeting the challenge

For nearly three years, the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme's PEPDEL project has been fostering a disability perspective in the regular curriculum on labour and employment law and policy at the Faculty of Law at the University of Addis Ababa (UAA).

There are two curricula at the Faculty: Bachelor of Laws (LLB), a five year programme; and, Master of Laws (LLM), a two year programme. Both incorporate the theme of disability, a relatively new development resulting from the Memorandum of Understanding signed between with the UAA and ILO-Irish Aid. At the Masters' level, disability is incorporated in several of the courses offered, and through a separate course on the rights of persons with disabilities. At the undergraduate level, disability is addressed in several of the programmes offered, including children's rights, rights of prisoners, rights of persons with disabilities, and others. Disability may also be included in a number of other courses, for example, on human rights.

For lecturer Murado Abdo, including a disability perspective in the law means "no longer creating separate laws but diffusing the issue of disability into all aspects of law."

"Disabled persons may have some special requirements, but this should not merit separate legislation. Disabled persons are like us. Another important aspect of integrating disability in the law, for example, in contract or employment law, is that it allows for the inclusion of special considerations for this group, which makes it easier to interpret."

Similar initiatives to incorporate disability considerations into the law curricula are currently underway in Zambia in addition to China, Thailand and Viet Nam.



Ethiopia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in July 2010. It has also ratified the ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), No. 159.

The PEPDEL project encourages interest in disability and law by providing grants to support research undertaken by faculty lecturers and students on the theme. To date, two research papers have been written by university lecturers: “Disability and the Right to Work: An Assessment of Proclamation 568/2008” and “Disability and Access to the Criminal Justice System in Addis Ababa”. Some five visually impaired students enrolled in the undergraduate law programme contributed working papers which provided background information for the final papers prepared. These papers were formally presented at a colloquium held for faculty for the purpose of informing and sensitizing on disability issues and the law.

What is more, the ILO-Irish Aid’s PEPDEL project supplies the Faculty of Law with Amharic language versions of “Achieving Equal Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities through Legislation” - guidelines for policy-makers and drafters of legislation to help improve the effectiveness of national laws concerning training and employment of disabled persons.

Also supported by the project is a Centre for Disability Law and Policy at the University of the Western Cape, in South Africa. The Centre has been established to act as a regional resource, carrying out research and organizing training courses, as well as offering a Master’s course in disability law and policy from 2011.

The Disability Centre at the University of Addis Ababa

The Disability Centre caters to the needs of all disabled students. It serves two main functions: provides IT space, including computers equipped with JAWS software for students who are blind or visually impaired; and, facilitates the purchase of materials that may be used by students, for example, Braille paper, micro-cassettes. The Ministry of Education disburses funds to support services provided by the centre.



The good practice

Law students and faculty benefit from an improved awareness on the rights of persons with disabilities. Future lawyers take disability rights into account.

Lessons learned

- Involvement of students in research is a key to generating interest, building capacity and knowledge of disability and may help to create a new cadre of disability-law specialists. In addition, student involvement helps sensitize and raise their awareness on disability rights issues.
- Building a knowledge base on disability rights issues among future lawyers, judges and legislators provides a solid base for further advocacy work.



Photo: ILO / A. Fiorente



Further information: