

Moving Towards Disability Inclusion

Thailand

Promoting disability inclusion in the media

The media - television, radio, newspapers, magazines, the internet, social media and other forms - play an important role in influencing public opinion and attitudes. In Bangkok, Thailand, the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme's PEPDEL project works through Disabled Peoples' International/ Asia Pacific (DPI/AP) to promote positive images of people with disabilities in the media and to stimulate a climate of non-discrimination and equal opportunity for disabled persons at all levels of the economy and society. A main aim of the collaboration is to influence the development of a media industry policy on disability.



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.

Thailand

The challenge

How people with disabilities are portrayed and the frequency with which they appear in the media has an enormous impact on how they are regarded in society. While there are some disability-specific media programmes, such as television documentaries, disabled people rarely appear as part of mainstream programmes. When they do, they are often stigmatized or stereotyped and may appear as either objects of pity or super heroic figures. Including them in regular programmes on television or radio in addition to other types of media can help provide fair and balanced representation and helps to counter commonplace stereotypes that perpetuate negative perceptions of disabled persons.

Portraying people with disabilities with dignity and respect in the media can help promote more inclusive and tolerant societies. Why is this important? First, because people with disabilities make up more than one billion of the world's population. In Thailand, nearly 3 per cent of the population, or two million women and men, have a disability. Many are subject to discrimination or exclusion from basic services such as health, education, training and work opportunities. Second, in many countries, disabled persons often lack access to information about policies, laws and improvements in programmes and services that directly affect them. This perpetuates their exclusion from life.

Promoting equality of opportunities and access to services and information for people with disabilities is also critical to strategies for reducing poverty. Initiatives and actions by individual journalists can make a difference in helping disabled persons feel less isolated, while at the same time challenging negative attitudes and mistaken assumptions about their abilities.

Meeting the challenge

In Thailand, few groups are able to effectively engage in disability advocacy and provide results. DPI/AP, a non-governmental organization (NGO) of people with disabilities, is one of them. It has adopted the slogan '*Nothing About Us Without Us*', which is used by the disability movement internationally, to communicate the idea that no policy should be decided by any representative or group without the full and direct participation of disabled persons that are affected by the policy.

DPI/AP has demonstrated its commitment to full participation and equality by their actions on the ground. Initiatives undertaken by DPI/AP have included promoting the concept of universal design, which calls attention to the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be usable by all people, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Yet another is accessible tourism, or travel arrangements designed to accommodate the broadest range of tourists possible. Under this initiative, the NGO works together with partners from business and government in Thailand and within the Asia region to promote accessible tourism.

But, it was DPI/AP's participation in the Disability Equality Training (DET) workshop in 2007, supported by ILO-Irish Aid, which expanded the NGO's capacity to offer its wealth of knowledge and real insights on disability issues to a wide range of actors interested in increasing disability awareness within their groups or businesses. ILO-supported implementation of DET and training of DET facilitators from different countries has helped challenge participants to view disability differently, identify new approaches in work practice, and plan strategies to implement change.

Later on, an agreement with the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme in 2009 allowed DPI/AP to begin outreach activities aimed at the media. The main objectives were to promote balanced and accurate reporting on persons with disabilities, encourage positive images of disabled persons, and advocate for their rights. Success in these areas would also provide a platform for further work towards the development of a media industry policy on disability.

As part of the process of preparing to work with the media, DPI/AP began a review of the Thai media's portrayal of disability over the past years, mostly to track how the issue has been presented over

the years and to share its findings at a subsequent gathering of journalists. Next, it prepared and disseminated a questionnaire to a select group of national newspaper and broadcast journalists to gauge their views and understanding on disability. Initially, questionnaire responses were low which led DPI/AP to rethink its strategy. A decision was made to establish contact with two well-known and respected media companies – JSL Global Media and the Radio-Television Broadcasting Professional Federation (RTBPF) – as a way of connecting with journalists. The move paid off and enabled DPI/AP to gain more credibility with the media, a better understanding of the needs and interests of media personnel and information on current trends in the portrayal of disabled persons. Retired, prominent journalists with an interest in social issues were also approached and asked to volunteer their knowledge and 'connections' with current management of key media companies in the country as a way of facilitating access for DPI/AP.

Awareness-raising exercises aimed at representatives of the national media in Bangkok by DPI/AP began in August 2010 with a Disability Equality Training (DET) workshop. The exercise also served to introduce the *ILO Media Guidelines for the Portrayal of Disability*, which includes a chapter on appropriate terminology, review of the British Broadcasting Corporation's (BBC's) policy on disability, which is often referenced as the model for disability inclusion in the industry, and information on what the media can do to positively shape public perceptions and attitudes towards disabled persons. The workshop was instrumental in forging closer cooperation between the NGO and the media to promote and support issues related to disability and disabled persons; encouraging media companies to make their buildings more accessible; and, in stimulating media representatives to consider policy guidelines for hiring disabled persons as well as their portrayal in the media.

Building on the workshop, DPI/AP subsequently organized another gathering. This time the invitation was made through RTBPF, whose president has expressed her commitment to doing her share to help break down the barriers. "The media, especially the private ones, can have an impact in society when it portrays people with disabilities. We have duty to give aid and help. Today, we gather here to exchange views to see what we can do and what people with disabilities want", says Ms. Jamnan Siritan, President of Radio-Television Broadcasting Professional Federation of Thailand.

At present, draft guidelines for the Thai media on disabilities, which has pulled together elements from the previous meeting's discussion on the subject, have been created. The draft guidelines provide a framework for presenting disabilities in the media, using appropriate language, and interviewing disabled persons. It also provides a list of key messages about the employment of disabled persons, in addition to a checklist for promoting accessibility. Further dialogue on the draft guidelines for Thailand, including how best to move on formulating a final draft, is envisioned in 2011.

DPI/AP's vision is to continue working closely with the media, creating a more formal collaboration with its representatives to ensure that disability is at the forefront of news and reporting on human rights issues and that the disability community is consulted. Already, DPI/AP has established close cooperation with Thai Public Broadcasting Station, Channel 3, Channel 5, The Nation, The Bangkok Post, and Persons with Disability Media.

Enhancing Media Awareness on Disability in Viet Nam and China

In both Beijing and Hanoi, translated versions of the ILO "Media guidelines for the portrayal of disability", prepared under the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme, have also been used as a basis for conducting workshops aimed at sensitizing media representatives to disability concepts and appropriate terminology, considering new angles for stories on disability and stimulating media companies to increase the presence of people with disabilities both on the air and on screen, in addition to their respective work environments.

Disabled Peoples' International/Asia Pacific

Founded in 1981, Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) is a global network of grassroots organizations of people with disabilities, headquartered in Canada with National Assemblies in more than 120 countries. Eighty percent of DPI's National Assemblies are in developing countries.

DPI/AP represents one of the six regional offices of DPI; there are 26 member organizations in the Asia-Pacific region. Half the DPI/AP staff have disabilities.

Disability Equality Training

The ILO's Disability Equality Training (DET) gives participants the opportunity to explore the concept of people being disabled by society's barriers and attitudes. It highlights the role of an organization or group in removing those barriers and in helping to change attitudes. A key element of the ILO's DET is that it respects participants as experts in their own fields, and so aims to build on their existing knowledge and skills. In the Asia-Pacific region, ILO-Irish Aid organized a DET Training of Facilitators workshop, which was attended by DPI/AP.

Another group trained to facilitate DET is the Network of Music and Arts of Persons with Disabilities (NMAD), an NGO which promotes the full participation and equal opportunity of persons with disabilities in the mainstream music and arts industry. NMAD has also been trained on conducting 'accessibility audits' based on international guidelines, in addition to measures on accessible environments for disabled persons provided by the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. In essence, a disability access audit identifies barriers, measures ease of use of premises and provides options for improvement of a building, business or service. Following an audit, an accessibility report is provided. The report contains recommendations that are easily followed and understood with realistic and manageable timescales. Within the past year, NMAD has organized several audits of work premises of select companies represented by and in close cooperation with the trade unions - for example, with the Thai Trade Union Congress, or TTUC, and the State Enterprises Workers' Relations Confederation, or SERC.

The good practice

Media guidelines promote more positive, inclusive images of disabled persons. Representatives of the media become 'disability champions', taking an interest in disseminating fair and balanced information on the issue and in promoting a rights-based to persons with disabilities.

Lessons learned

- Advocacy efforts aimed at the media may be more effective when planned in partnership with established media outlets.
- Support from established media outlets helps to tackle negative attitudes, mistaken assumptions about persons with disabilities and in promoting the rights of persons with disabilities.

Further information:

International Labour Office
Skills and Employability Department
disability@ilo.org

ILO/Irish Aid Partnership Programme
<http://www.ilo.org/inclusion>



Skills and
Employability
Department