

Moving Towards Disability Inclusion

Thailand

Mainstreaming disability in the law curriculum at Thammasat University

Integrating a disability perspective into a law curriculum helps provide a 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 Thammasat University in Bangkok to include disability in the law curriculum. Over the long-term, this will help to ensure that future generations of lawyers and judges routinely consider the impact of their work on disabled people and improve the possibilities for creating legal frameworks that promote their full inclusion in the 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.

Thailand

The challenge

The past two decades have witnessed a dramatic shift from viewing persons with disabilities as 'objects' of protection, treatment and assistance to individuals with basic human rights. This shift to a human rights perspective requires a review of the social and physical factors that constrain the participation of disabled persons in society. It also necessitates an assessment of national laws and policies to ensure that disability 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 will be responsible for promoting and protecting human rights is vital to achieving the aspirations enshrined in international instruments and conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities¹ and the International Labour Organization Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), No. 159. Towards this aim, institutions of higher learning are strategic partners in the process of change.

Meeting the challenge

Under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between the Faculty of Law at Thammasat University and the PEPDEL project in April 2010, several initiatives have been undertaken to ensure that future generations of judges and lawyers receive as broad an exposure as possible to the various facets of law and equal rights. Within this framework, the university provided a two-month summer course on disability law and awareness (April-May 2010). Nearly 200 students attended the course which included two lectures delivered by the Sub-regional coordinator of PEPDEL highlighting issues of discrimination against disabled persons in the context of employment. The ILO's work in this particular area was presented, in addition to an opportunity to engage with students on issues related to negative perceptions of people with disabilities and attitudes of society.

The collaboration between the two institutions also supported original research on Thailand's quota system for employing disabled persons. Research outcomes showed a lack of awareness among employers of current laws on persons with disabilities. Preliminary outcomes also suggested that for many Thai employers, the concept of discrimination was difficult to understand as were quota systems, underscoring the need for concrete examples to increase compliance, and reasonable accommodation. Students played an important role in administering the research questionnaire and in processing the data gathered, facilitating their learning experiences and awareness about the issue.

"The quota system is, perhaps, a good thing for Thailand at the moment", says Professor Wiriya of Thammasat University. "For the time being, however, I think more needs to be done in the area of job matching, specifically getting quality information about the jobs and matching those with the skills of the jobseeker."

Another initiative under the MOU included awareness-raising. Twenty-five students, a majority third year students, from the Asia Law Students' Association (ALSA) were invited to take part in Disability Equality Training (DET). DET explores the concept of people being disabled by society's barriers and attitudes. It highlights the role of the group or individual in removing those barriers and in helping to change attitudes.

"The training stimulated me to think", said third year law student Chonlathan Supphalboonlerd who participated in the training. "Imagine you are a wheelchair user looking for a job but there is not a company with a front door wide enough for you to get through. Circumstances like these happen every day with disabled persons. If we are able to get through the door to get into the building so should disabled persons. They just need different types of doors and other facilities. Think about it, if all facilities were accessible, some day many more people with disabilities would be able to work just like everyone else."

Introducing a disability perspective into the law curriculum is being perceived by many as an innovative way to connect with future generations of lawyers and judges and offer exposure to broad international human rights issues and participation research initiatives.

Student members of ALSA express their views on what is needed to promote a more inclusive society:

"I think disability inclusion begins with the individual."

"Awareness-raising and support from the media."

"Education."

"I think it's time to put an end to discrimination."

"Make things accessible for everyone to use."

"Support not only equality but also humanity."

"Make simple accessibility for everyone in society."

"Make a starting point, make it important and do it from yourself."

"Equality for every disabled person."



Members of the Thailand chapter of the Asia Law Students' Association (ALSA)

The good practice

Students and faculty benefit from an improved awareness on disability.

Lessons learned

- The involvement of law students in disability research helps build their knowledge and understanding of disability and helps create a new cadre of disability-law specialists.
- Students make the best advocates when equipped with knowledge, skills and means to affect change.



Photo: ILO / J. Sanchez

ENDNOTE

¹ Thailand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 29 July 2008; it also ratified ILO Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons), No. 159, on 11 October 2007.

Further information:

International Labour Office
Skills and Employability Department
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ILO/Irish Aid Partnership Programme
<http://www.ilo.org/inclusion>