

Moving Towards Disability Inclusion

Cambodia

In Takeo, ILO projects help to forge pathways out of poverty for people with disabilities

TAKEO, Cambodia - On a hot Saturday afternoon in a small village in Takeo, Kaeng Kor makes her way to Meas Savary's home to begin weaving split pieces of bamboo that will be used to make pencil cup holders, handheld fans, baskets and wallets.

Though the short walk may take her a bit longer than most due to the uneven lengths of her legs - a condition she's had since birth - she doesn't mind. Kaeng Kor looks forward to enjoying the company of the other women and men who form part of the business association to which she belongs.

The 48-year-old has been a member of the association for nearly four years now. She's been in the handicrafts business for most of her life, but things have changed for the better since joining the group. "Savary has taught me how to design new products. Also, my limited mobility makes it difficult for me to go and visit clients. Association membership has helped to facilitate this interaction and provide a steady stream of income."

From another part of the village, Cham Sophal walks alone to Meas' to join the others. The 47-year-old father of four also works in the handicrafts business. In his spare time, he cultivates rice and grows vegetables. In the past, Cham Sophal used to earn a living repairing motorbikes, a skill he learned while serving in the army, but a land mine accident 21 years ago resulted in his losing a leg.



Cambodia



"I learned about the association through an awareness-raising workshop conducted by Savary. She explained the aims and functions of the association. I was shown the products, something I was familiar with given that my parents were in the handicrafts business."

"I'm happy with this job. It's comfortable, flexible and I now have the skills. I make a good income through this work: from US\$ 45 to US\$ 50 a month. Most of it goes to support my son's education; he's attending the university. I also use my money to provide food for my family. I earn more from this business than I did repairing motorbikes", says Cham Sophal. "I like it here. People see me no different from themselves."

In Takeo, access to skills training, business association membership, financial education and credit has improved since the mid-2000s as a result of the Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality project (WEDGE), which seeks to include women with disabilities as part of its strategy. Synergies established between WEDGE and another ILO project, the INCLUDE project, which

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.

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supports the inclusion of disabled persons in programmes and services, including in entrepreneurship development and vocational training, work together to make a difference in the lives of women and people with disabilities who are struggling to change their economic condition.

Though estimates vary significantly, there may be some 700,000 disabled people in the country¹. They are among the most vulnerable group in Cambodian society.

Kaeng Kor and Cham Sophal are individuals who have benefitted from the ILO projects, thanks to their joining the local business association. Yet, in Takeo it is Meas Savary, a known handicraft maker, who has demonstrated how just one person can influence the lives of many people in her community.

An opportunity to take part in WEDGE-supported business skills training in 2006 exposed Savary to new knowledge and learning². "I didn't know about business principles, nor did I fully understand what was meant by 'quality control' or 'product diversification' and why this is important. WEDGE training changed all of this. I'm happy to share this information and new skills with other members of my association", says Savary.

Since then, Savary has participated in several WEDGE activities, including Improve Your Exhibiting Skills (IYES). IYES is designed to improve market access by facilitating the organization of trade fairs and exhibitions. Shortly after, she formed a business association - the Khmer Women's Handicraft Association - with several other members of her community who are also involved in the production of similar crafts.

Association membership has helped to promote the group's economic interest through more effective marketing and promotion, reduce social risks and vulnerabilities, and facilitate exchange of information and knowledge.

Two years ago, Meas Savary decided to form a self-help savings group, another component of the WEDGE strategy designed to assist women gain financial literacy and access credit. WEDGE provides guidance on how groups should organize - preferably into groups of up to 20 members - setting up administrative procedures and internal regulations. The fund is owned by the group and consists of the savings that each member contributes weekly, which becomes the resource for making short-term, low interest rate loans to members. Dividends are equally split among members at the end of the year.

Committed community leaders like Meas Savary are a key to promoting economic security and forging pathways out of poverty for many of Cambodia's poorest family, including disabled women and men.



Photos: ILO / J. Sanchez



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ILO strategy on promoting women's entrepreneurship development (WED)

ILO WED Strategy was built from the expertise developed under WEDGE. WEDGE is comprised of technical cooperation projects that are funded by donor governments of Ireland (Irish Aid) and Norway (NORAD) and enable the WED strategy to be operationalized. Building on local partnerships, WEDGE projects have developed a series of tools and approaches, based on the research and experience from pilot projects organized with local partners and country offices. WED aims to include women entrepreneurs with disabilities and HIV/AIDS within WEDGE projects. The WED strategy provides a flexible and innovative response to promote women's entrepreneurship development based on local needs and circumstances. Gender equality is and will remain at the forefront of the WED strategy.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ ILO Fact Sheet: Inclusion of people with disabilities in Cambodia, (Geneva, Switzerland, 2009), http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_115096.pdf, accessed 17.03.2011.
- ² In Cambodia, WEDGE works with through government agencies, community organizations representing workers and employers and local non-governmental organizations.

Further information:

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

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

Women's Entrepreneurship
Development and Gender Equality
Small Enterprise Programme
<http://www.ilo.org/seed>