

Disabled persons represent some 83 million women and men in China, or 6.3 per cent of the population. Because of stigma and discrimination, many are excluded from education, training and employment. They are among the most vulnerable in times of crisis - whether person-made or natural. Yet out of crisis comes an opportunity to do things differently. Ms. Liu Chunxiu, National Programme Coordinator on Disability for the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme's PEPDEL Project in Beijing shares stories of two disabled persons who were included in a vocational / livelihoods training provided by the Emergency-Start and Improve Your Business (E-SIYB), a training initiative started to help economic recovery following the deadly May 12, 2008 Sichuan earthquake that killed more than 80,000 people.

Mianzhu township, Sichuan Province (ILO) - I was recently invited to share some thoughts on how inclusive approaches to mainstream training and entrepreneurship development initiatives help promote decent work for people with disabilities at a training workshop, which was held in Mianzhu township, Sichuan province in mid-June, 2010. The workshop was part of a Livelihood Recovery Assistance Project being implemented in several townships of the province to help start or restore lost livelihoods in areas affected by the 2008 Sichuan earthquake. Two years after the massive earthquake struck the province, Mianzhu township remains among the most devastated areas, with many of its inhabitants still receiving humanitarian assistance.

Tools and concepts being utilized by the Livelihoods Recovery Project to aid in business start-ups and job creation include Emergency-Start and Improve Your Business (E-SIYB) – based on the ILO's internationally recognized management-training programme which focuses on starting and improving small businesses – and Community-Based Training. Through the Project, beneficiaries are provided with a combination of skills training and related support services at the local level. Working through trained intermediaries and partner organizations, both approaches seek to ensure that selected disabled persons are provided with the opportunity to take part in business skills training alongside non-disabled persons.

Yet, it was E-SIYB's commitment to inclusive approaches to vocational/livelihoods training that helped make the difference in opening up the doors of opportunities and the possibility of a better life for people with disabilities. In late 2008, the Mianzhu Labour Bureau, the Mianzhu China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF), the Mianzhu Dongfang Vocational Training School, working together with the ILO technical advisors, developed a training plan to incorporate disabled persons. Local CDPF staff's guidance to SIYB trainers on what to consider when teaching people with different types of disabilities and on how to run fully integrated training programmes was also a key factor in securing the success of the new approach and in establishing a specialized group of E-SIYB trainers. With Mianzhu Dongfang Vocational Training School's extensive experience in providing SIYB training, the schools was ready to open its doors to people with disabilities in early 2009.

Two disabled persons whose lives were transformed as a result of inclusive approaches to vocational / livelihoods training were Mr. Zheng Ming Jun, a 35 year old farmer from Mianzhu Township who became disabled as a result of infantile paralysis, and Mr. Liu Gang Jun, a 45 year old amputee who lost his right leg as a result of serious injuries sustained during the earthquake. Prior to his accident, Mr. Liu worked in a mining factory and received a good income from his job. Both these individuals' stories were made known to me by Mr. Sun Bin, a principal of the Mianzhu Dongfang Technical Vocational Training school with 10 years' experience in SIYB training and who was instrumental in helping the disabled men learn new skills and achieve their goals of starting their own businesses.

Both Mr. Zheng and Mr. Liu were among the first to attend the E-SIYB training organized by Mianzhu Dongfang Technical Vocational Training School. "They were very active in the training, asking lots of questions, joining in the group discussions and even attended the warm-up exercises. During the training, they learned what factors to consider when starting a business, among them market research, profitability, producer and location. They also learned technical skills such as costing and pricing, bookkeeping, management of self and teamwork, among other skills," explained Mr. Bin, as we discussed the contents of the training.

After 7 days of intensive training, Mr. Zheng and Mr. Liu took the steps necessary to start their own businesses in their home towns.

Mr. Liu and his two partners opened a small shop called "Dream Flying", selling drinks and other food items near his home. His business gets better and better through their hard work, spirit of confidence, and knowledge Mr. Liu learned in the E-SIYB training course. With average income earnings about RMB2000 per month approximately USD294), he plans to further expand his business by opening a small supermarket in the new town that he expects to move to. "I want to employ people with disabilities in my supermarket. I hope more people with disabilities can get E-SIYB training because it is a useful course", he says. According to the Mianzhu CDPF, there are about 13,500 disabled people living in Mianzhu township, about 2,700 who became newly disabled after the Wenchuan Earthquake.

Mr. Zheng got his idea to be a medical equipment agent while participating in the E-SIYB training course. His business is now making progress and he generates about RMB1000 per month (approximately USD 147). He is confident about expanding his business soon.