

Moving Towards Disability Inclusion

Viet Nam

Disability inclusion support services

Disability inclusion refers to the active involvement of people with disabilities in programmes, services, plans and opportunities available to others without a disability. It requires the recognition of all people with disabilities as members of society, respect for all of their rights and the removal of barriers - physical, attitudinal, and others - that might prevent the enjoyment of these rights. In Viet Nam, the Disabled Peoples' Association, or DP Hanoi, works on behalf of the ILO-Irish Aid Partnership Programme's INCLUDE project to promote disability inclusion.



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.

Viet Nam

The challenge

Nearly seven million women and men have a disability in Viet Nam. Very few who are of working age have stable jobs and regular incomes. Many remain outside of formal employment due to discrimination and negative attitudes and mistaken assumptions about their abilities. As a group, their unemployment rates are high - some estimate as high as 30 per cent¹.

In Hanoi, the Disabled Peoples' Association or DP/Hanoi, an NGO representing over 40 organizations of disabled persons in 24 districts of the province with a combined membership of some 5,000, works to raise awareness and promote the participation of people with disabilities in society. Since April 2010, the association has been helping to further the INCLUDE project's primary aim of mainstreaming a disability perspective in general programmes and services available to public.

As the project's designated INCLUDE Agency, DP-Hanoi offers Disability Equality Training (DET), the main tool used as part of its strategy to promote greater access to opportunities and social inclusion. The ultimate goal of DET is to foster a better understanding of disability based on the principles of rights, equality and non-discrimination. Its approach leads participants to examine ways of removing the barriers in the environment that prevent participation and equality for disabled people, rather than focusing on the disabled person and their impairment as something to be "cured" or minimized.

To realize these aims, DET has two objectives and components. The first aims to provide disability awareness-raising for non-disabled participants that help them develop an alternative view of disability. The second facilitates development of their own concrete action plans to break down barriers that hinder the participation of disabled people in relation to their own work and daily lives.

DET is distinguished by the way in which it helps participants understand how barriers are created, including how they may be contributing to a disabling environment, and how to prevent or break through them. A key element of the INCLUDE project's brand of DET is that it respects participants as experts in their own fields, and so aims to build on their existing knowledge and skills.

Perhaps, more significant, however, is that through DET participants become agents for organizational change and through proactive efforts help break down barriers.

Meeting the challenge

DET complements a range of other services and activities offered by DP Hanoi such as skills training, job interview skills, business management and the ILO's training package Gender and Entrepreneurship Together (GET Ahead) which introduces discussions on gender around topics related to running a business.

Yet, both the concept and implementation of DET has been slow in getting off the ground. For example, building DP Hanoi's capacity to effectively manage and deliver workshops as DET trainers has taken longer than expected, requiring more involvement from project staff. Additional challenges have included cultural beliefs about equality and negative attitudes of officials about the aims of DET. These factors necessitated some revisions to the training. For example, the first part of the training now contains a module on national laws and policies on disability and emphasizes the government's commitment to disabled persons' human rights. DET trainers have noticed that the changes have contributed to a more attentive audience and less attrition over the three-day training.

Despite initial difficulties, there has been noticeable progress. DP Hanoi has delivered several DET workshops with the joint participation of disabled and non-disabled persons representing a variety of stakeholders including: the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) together with their provincial and district representatives of Departments of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISAs); disabled persons organizations; trade union (women's union); employment centres under MOLISA/Hanoi; and, the media.

Following training, several participants have expressed their readiness to use their new experiences to promote change. For example, the Social Policy Bank, the agency responsible for issuing microfinance loans, has asked DP Hanoi for assistance in implementing their action plan. DP Hanoi currently supports the Social Policy Bank in the development and dissemination of information on requirements for accessing microfinance loans and procedures for filing applications. Another important outcome has been the commitment made by the Social Policy Bank's representative to encourage the leadership of the bank (the People's Committee) to lend additional support to disabled persons in the form of specifically earmarked funds to extend as loans to this group.

Other positive changes have included the Hanoi Employment Centre's willingness to explore together with DP Hanoi a series of interactive sessions aimed at employers: the first would focus on identifying their concerns about employing disabled job seekers; the second would cover difficulties in recruiting disabled workers and providing support, if needed. These activities can be perceived as a new way forward in bridging the employment gap between disabled and non-disabled workers. Moreover, it represents a break from traditional job fairs which are held as often as three times per month but which do not include the participation of disabled persons.

DET workshops have also been extended to groups beyond the traditional ILO constituents and partners. Both the Spanish Red Cross and the Viet Nam Red Cross, working in the Lâm Đông and Hu'ng Yên provinces and districts on a project focussing on employment for disabled persons, have requested disability equality training for its staff.

Still, much more work remains for DP Hanoi to effectively influence and make further inroads towards closing the gaps of opportunity and the full inclusion of disabled persons. It's a process that requires time but that, in the end, will have a positive impact on inclusive approaches to the provision of services for persons with disabilities.

What is needed to promote a more inclusive, open society?

"I think two things are necessary to create a more open society for disabled people. First, disabled persons should raise their capacity. Second, some barriers in society need to be removed. For example, enterprises need to open their doors to disabled persons so that they can work and earn a living. In addition, there's the issue of education. Schools need to be open to disabled children, in particular, children with autism as well as those with an intellectual disability. Regarding transportation, we need a more open and accessible environment."

- Duong Thi Van, Vice-Chairwoman, DP Hanoi



Photo: ILO / Thoi Luu Thuan

The good practice

Helping disabled job seekers access employment services. Promoting access to microfinance for people with disabilities interested in starting or already in business.

Lessons learned

- Support and commitment at the highest levels is a key to disability inclusion.
- The concept of disability inclusion is complex and takes time to explain. Providing examples of how disability inclusion is promoted in a variety of settings and situations is important.
- Follow-up support, in particular, as it pertains to disability 'action plans' is important in building long-term efforts towards inclusive development.
- The involvement of people with disabilities as trainers and facilitators helps others learn through the challenge of interaction.
- Greater need for disabled persons' organizations to think 'development inclusion' and to more assertively lobby service providers to include disabled persons.



Photo: ILO / H. Nguyen

ENDNOTES

- ¹ ILO Fact Sheet: Inclusion of people with disabilities in Viet Nam, (Geneva, Switzerland, 2009), http://www.ilo.org/skills/what/pubs/lang--en/docName--WCMS_112407/index.htm, accessed 14.03.11.

Further information:

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