

Access to work is essential not only for an individual's economic security but also for their personal wellbeing and sense of belonging. Unfortunately too few youths and adults with disabilities are able to access meaningful livelihoods that allow them to meet their needs and those of their families. The economic consequences of exclusion of people with disabilities from jobs and livelihoods are quite significant at all levels - people with a disability, their family and society - in terms of income & productivity losses and costs of disability benefits.⁽¹⁾

GAPS IN ACCESSING JOBS AND LIVELIHOODS

Hidden away and/or overprotected by their families and denied a basic education from childhood, adults with disabilities often lack suitable business, technical and life skills to improve their situation and are often unaware of their rights. This along with limited knowledge and confidence in accessing services gives rise to low self-esteem and overall social exclusion.

Among the challenges are widespread misconceptions and stereotypes leading to negative attitudes and behaviours of people with disabilities; little or no accessible transportation; exclusion from mainstream services and/or workplace due to physical inaccessibility of the facilities and barriers in policies, procedures and practices. Furthermore there is a lack of availability and/or awareness of tailor-made support services and poor coordination of services. Services that should be empowering adults with disabilities in order for them to participate in paid employment, thereby maximizing their productivity, are few and far between. Most existing development and poverty reduction programmes pay little attention to the inclusion of people with disabilities in their programmes.

LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Human rights provisions: UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD, Article 27) recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others.

International: The new 2015-2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by 193 countries, calls for equal access to all levels of education and vocational training (Goal 4.5) and for full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for persons with disabilities (Goal 8.5).

QUICK FACTS

- Unemployment among people with disabilities who are able and willing to work is as high as **80%** in some countries (ILO, 2007)⁽²⁾
- People with intellectual impairments are **three to four times less likely** to be employed than people without disabilities (WHO, World Report on Disability, 2011)⁽³⁾
- Exclusion of people with disabilities from the workplace deprives societies of an estimated **US\$ 1.37-1.94 trillion** in annual loss in GDP (Robert L. Metts, 2000)⁽⁴⁾
- In the USA workers with disabilities earn less than their peers **earning just 63 cents for every dollar** that workers without a disability earn (American Institute for Research, 2014)⁽⁵⁾



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It is a myth that people with disabilities can only engage in a limited number of livelihood activities. People with disabilities have different capacities, interests and needs. Stereotypes and preconceived ideas about livelihood activities based on impairment limits the productivity of people with disabilities able to work. For example someone with a visual impairment is perfectly able to engage in farming activities, but they are often forced into working in a massage shop. This is because labour market stereotypes in Thailand perceive visually impaired people as being better able to give massages because it does not require sight.

Likewise, it is a myth that accommodating a worker with disabilities is too expensive. The fact is not all workers with disabilities require adaptations at all. If adjustments are needed these are often more about how and when a job is done and costs nothing. For example adopting flexible working hours, or allowing someone to sit rather than stand to perform a task. In fact according to the US Department of Labour a typical one-time expenditure costs less than \$500.⁽⁶⁾

WHAT CAN LIVELIHOOD ACTORS DO?

Practitioners

- Hire employees with disabilities because it makes business sense! (e.g. better retention, low absenteeism rates, reliable, highly motivated, bring unique perspectives and experiences to the workplace);⁽⁷⁾
- Shift from a 'one-size-fits-all' to 'tailor-made' approach - people have various livelihood needs, capacities and interests;
- Where existing employment services are not accessible ensure any alterations are done on a case-by-case basis with the involvement of the person with the disability to help define what reasonable accommodations might be so as not to incur unnecessary and costly alterations;
- Establish dialogue with representatives of people with disabilities (e.g. DPO, SHG) to effectively identify, attract and support potential trainees/clients/workers with disabilities;
- When needed, ensure access to disability-specific services that can improve the functional autonomy of people with disabilities when undertaking livelihood activities: e.g. physiotherapy, assistive devices, workplace/tools/equipment adaptations;
- When needed, ensure that livelihood tools, messages and training events are available in accessible formats (e.g. large print, pictorial and audio formats, accompanied sign language) and held in accessible venues;
- Promote financial inclusion that explicitly targets people with disabilities. This can be done without the need to provide specialised products or services.⁽⁸⁾

States

- Introduce disability-related employment laws and policies that are neither too vague nor overly broad and based on budget and resources available to ensure their genuine enforcement;
- Improve capacities of civil servants by integrating disability training and induction programmes in all relevant departments (vocational training, employment, economic development, agriculture, etc.);
- Increase visibility of people with disabilities who do work/ are in leadership positions on TV and in mainstream media to challenge deeply rooted myths.

Donors

- Promote international comparative studies to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of policies and laws in improving employment opportunities for people with disabilities;
- Impose obligations to include disability inclusion indicators in livelihood funded programmes' monitoring and reporting framework;
- Promote capacity building of Disabled People Organizations on disability-related employment policies and their enforcement for more effective advocacy actions at national level.

HOW TO MEASURE PROGRESS?

Access to services

Increased number of beneficiaries/users/clients with disabilities within the services/programs • Increased number of people with disabilities accessing livelihood services adapted to their needs • Improved knowledge, attitudes and practices among the staff • Communication processes and procedures provided in accessible formats • Available budget dedicated to the provision of reasonable accommodations/adjustments for disabled employees.

Legislation and policies

National policies and strategies explicitly include disability into their targets and action plans • Budget allocated to enforce existing policies/strategies • Existence of reliable data on people with disabilities & employment • Existence of national mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of disability-related employment laws and policies (quota, financial incentives, etc.)

Handicap International (HI) currently runs 35 livelihood projects in 29 countries. In the Batticaloa district of eastern Sri Lanka HI and the Centre for Accessibility, Monitoring and Information on Disability (CAMID) have just completed a 3 year project working with local private and government livelihood service providers to sensitize, train and give on-the-spot support to key staff. Staff are now better equipped to identify specific barriers to inclusion and how they might address them.

Through the provision of tailored support, adults with disabilities in the targeted areas built their capacities and confidence to access services in order to develop their small businesses. The DPOs supported by the project played a significant and growing role as gatekeeper and in advocacy actions. A major milestone on the road to inclusion was the recognition by the livelihood service providers that disability is not just the responsibility of specialist organisations and all acknowledged that linking people with disabilities with existing local resources and programmes was more effective than providing separate and/or ad hoc services.