



# Statement on Disability Inclusive Development<sup>1</sup>

2013 High Level Round Table Meeting  
November 19th, Vientiane

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Two months ago, on the 23rd September, Heads of State and Government gathered in New York for the High-level meeting of the General Assembly on Disability and Development “The way forward, a disability-inclusive development agenda towards 2015 and beyond”.

They made a clear commitment to promote “inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of development” and to give “due consideration to all persons with disabilities in the emerging post-2015 United Nations development agenda.”

They also committed to “Ensure that all development policies, including those regarding poverty eradication, social inclusion, full and productive employment and decent work, and access to basic social services, and their decision-making processes take into account the needs of and benefit all persons with disabilities...”

These commitments at the highest level are very encouraging. They encompass access to education, health services, vocational training and employment, social protection, information, national and community development, and equal participation in social and cultural life.

While we are now gathering to discuss progress in achieving development goals for the country and to set the direction for the future, we would like these global commitments to be reflected in our discussions and decisions.

## **The situation of persons with Disability in Lao PDR**

Available data on disability is scarce. The 2005 National Housing and Population Census identified around 79,000 persons with disabilities (1.4% of the population) but these figures underestimate the reality due to the insufficient quality of the questions. In its 2004 report, WHO estimated the prevalence rate of disability in Lao PDR to be 12.5% of the

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<sup>1</sup>Prepared by the Lao Disabled People Association and Handicap International

population. The Disability sector is now collaborating with the Lao Statistic Bureau to improve data collection on disability in the next census in 2015.

Currently in Lao PDR, persons with disabilities are facing barriers to access basic services such as health, education and employment on equal basis as their peers. This lack of access to basic services leads to reduced opportunities to contribute to the economic, social and cultural life of their families and communities. The result is that persons with disabilities may not participate fully to social and community development and face additional difficulties to elevate their social and economic situation. Ultimately, the lack of inclusion of persons with disabilities in basic community services results in increased vulnerability and a continuation of the cycle of poverty, disability and exclusion.

Organizations representing persons with disabilities in Lao PDR suggest that persons with disabilities want to participate to the economic, social and cultural development of their families and communities. With over 16,000 members across the country, the Lao Disabled People's Association is encouraging all persons with disabilities to participate in family and community life and contribute to the local and national development. However, when basic services are developed that are not accessible for persons with disabilities, the challenges are often too difficult to overcome.

## **A good momentum**

The Government of Laos ratified the UNCRPD<sup>2</sup> in September 2009 but very few policies have been adopted so far to ensure the enforcement and implementation of the Convention. A National Policy on Inclusive Education was approved in 2010. The drafting of a Decree on promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disability was started in 2007 and should be finalized by the end of the year. The Government of Laos also joined the Governments from the Asia Pacific region to adopt the Incheon strategy in November 2012 with the aim to "Make the rights Real" for persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific. The Incheon strategy provides the Asian and Pacific region, and the World, with the first set of regionally agreed disability –inclusive development goals. The Incheon strategy comprises 10 goals, 27 targets and 62 indicators.

The National Committee for Disabled Persons is the inter-ministerial coordination body for the disability sector. Since July 2012, its secretariat is chairing a disability sector coordination meeting composed of various stakeholders (government representatives, Development partners, INGO and disabled people organizations) who meet on regular basis to exchange information and look at ways to improve the sector.

A number of Disabled People organizations are being registered as Non Profit Associations and are contributing to serve their members, to raise awareness on disability issues and to engage in positive dialogue with the Government of Laos to promote rights of persons with Disability. As the leading National Disabled People's Association, the Lao

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons

Disabled People's Association represents more than 16,000 members across 11 Provinces.

Not only is there a growing interest in disability by INGOs and development partners, but there is now a growing awareness within government line ministries about disability issues due to a number of projects and seminars/workshops led by LDPA. In January 2012 a first Disability forum gathering state and non-state actors interested in disability was organised by NCDP, HI and LDPA. On 15th October 2013, the second disability forum was organised with a focus on inclusive development and the objective to move "from recommendation to practical actions".

During this Forum 40 Organizations, including 10 government offices/mass organizations, 11 Lao Non Profit Associations, 3 Lao media, 13 international NGOs and 3 international organizations/ development partners, shared their commitments to become more inclusive.

Their commitments included:

- the collection and sharing of data on persons with disability;
- the provision of training to their teams on disability rights, communication with disabled people, data collection, inclusive development, and media and disability;
- the promotion of employment of persons with disability;
- the improvement of their office physical accessibility;
- the consultation of Disabled People organizations for disability related matters and the development of partnership relations with them;
- the production of inclusive communication material.

## **What more can be done?**

*Priority1: Develop strong Legal Frameworks for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

Truly inclusive development is not possible without full legal protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. While the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has had a significant impact on raising the profile of disability rights and inclusive development around the world, there is still significant progress needed in developing national legal instruments that are harmonized to the intentions of the convention.

In Lao PDR, the Decree to promote the Rights for persons with Disability should be as soon as possible finalised, disseminated and implemented.

*Priority 2: Support the National Committee for Disabled People in its role of coordination of the disability sector*

Funding and technical support must be increased to support not only civil society, but also the relevant governmental bodies responsible for the national coordination of disability inclusive development. Funding should focus on supporting the establishment of disability sector networks and multi-sector coordination meetings/workshops. In addition, targeted funding must be allocated within each development sector to establishment of focal persons/units/departments responsible for advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities into individual development sectors and reporting challenges/successes to the national disability inclusive development coordination bodies.

*Priority 3: Support Disabled Peoples Organizations (DPOs) to promote the voice of persons with Disability*

The implementation of development policies and programmes for persons with disabilities will only obtain effective outcomes if persons with disabilities are in the lead in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of such programs. In order to achieve full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in development, significant focus and investment must be given to support the strengthening of Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs).

In order to effectively fulfill their role in representing interests of persons with Disability, DPOs require significant support for internal capacity development (i.e. English language training, report writing skills, project cycle management).

*Priority 4: Fully recognize Disability as a Cross-Cutting Issue*

Inclusive development for persons with disabilities cannot be achieved through the efforts of DPOs and specialized NGOs/INGOs alone. Following the experience of gender inclusive development, disability must be seen as a cross-cutting issue. As such, all development actors must allocate dedicated resources, both human and financial, to establish indicators for the inclusion of persons with disabilities into their development action, implement inclusive services, and effectively monitor development outcomes with disaggregated data collection tools capable of tracking the inclusion of persons with disabilities and identifying barriers for the full participation of persons with disabilities. Under Article 32 international development programmes are inclusive of and accessible to persons with disability.

*Priority 5: Invest in Disability Rights Awareness*

Awareness of the situation and rights of persons with disabilities must be extended throughout society. Focused awareness campaigns/programs must be designed and implemented to target policy-makers, the general public, and persons with disabilities and their family members.

### *Priority 6: Support Professional Capacity Development for Specialized Service Providers*

The provision of quality services for persons with disabilities requires the development of specialized service providers. Development stakeholders need to invest in education and professional training programs to facilitate the emergence of service providers capable of meeting the needs of the diverse population of persons with disabilities in society. Inclusive development for persons with disabilities will require investment into specialized professional capacity development in the following areas: Pediatric Medicine, Inclusive Education, Deaf Educators, Blind Educators, Teachers in Special Education, Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech Therapists, Social Workers, Counselors, Psychiatrists, etc. It must also be noted that investment into the development of specialized service providers will contribute not only to the health and wellbeing of persons with disabilities, but also to the general welfare of the entire society.