

## **Challenging livelihoods of persons with disabilities and missing gaps in policies**

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### **Abstract:**

Persons with disabilities (PWDs) are one of the most vulnerable groups who are facing a variety of difficulties. Poverty has a great impact on their livelihoods as well as the quality of their life. It has a tendency that the PWDs become poorer because of their disabilities and the burden of costs. The paper examines on their current livelihoods, employment and vocational training and relevant policies. Through desk review, case study and group discussion observation, the key findings show that PWDs in Vietnam are coping with a hardship livelihoods in poverty and there are significant missing gaps between the policies and its implementation. Finally, there are some recommendations on improving the policies and compatible models for their livelihood as a way of poverty reduction.

**Keywords:** Persons with disabilities, livelihoods, community- based rehabilitation, policies.

### **1. Current situations on employment and vocational training of persons with disabilities**

#### **Employment of persons with disabilities**

According to the Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), the whole country has approximately 7.8 million people with

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disabilities (PWD), of which 2.63 million disabled workers, accounting for approximately 5.3% of the total workforce. The labor force participation rate of PWD is quite low at 44.7% (Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2015). Notably, people with severe disabilities who do not participate in livelihood activities account for 74.7% (UNFPA, 2011).

PWD's employment is unsustainable and risky, with salaried laborers accounting for only 14.3%, only half the rate of the non-disabled group. The rate of disabled workers in the state sector is very low, at only 4.7%. Meanwhile, in the informal sector, 89.1% of the disabled workers work in individual household businesses and 3.4% in the private sector (Institute of Labour and Social Affairs, Hanns Seidel Foundation, 2015).

PWD's occupational structure tends to be traditional and unstable. The survey results on PWD's labor fields in 11 provinces in 2008 showed 41.1% of disabled workers worked in agriculture, forestry and fishery, 28.9% worked in commerce and services, 6% in small-scale industry and handicrafts, the remaining 24% work in various, unstable jobs, thus impossible to identify specific areas of work.

PWD's unemployment rate is higher than people without disabilities in both the urban and rural areas. In the urban areas, the rate of unemployed PWD is three times higher (4.3% compared to 14%) (ILO, 2013). PWD's ability to find suitable or stable jobs is low due to lack of education, poor health, harder mobility, limited access to employment information, physical barriers at work, as well as discrimination, even stigmatization, by employers.

There were some positive responses on disabled workers according to the survey "Enterprises and disabled workers in Viet Nam" conducted by VNAH and VCCI (2007), 3/4 of business owners were highly satisfied with PWD's work efficiency and shared positive perceptions of PWD, such as competent, reliable and loyal, that PWD are potential human resources and good business examples,

However, when asked about their recruitment plans, only 1/3 of the busi-

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nesses will hire disabled workers, the remaining 2/3 will not recruit them. According to Nguyen Dang Duong, Deputy Director of Nghe An Department of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, only a few foreign-invested enterprises in the province do a good job to create jobs for PWD. Duong Cong Chien, Deputy Director of Nghe An Center for Education and Vocational Training for People with Disabilities, said that among their offered training, only a number of garment businesses (mostly private enterprises) reach out to recruit their trainees. On the other hand, the majority of PWD have to seek employment on their own (Mai Hau, 2015).

Nguyen Manh Tu (Thuong Tin, Hanoi), a PWD, share, “Before deciding to apply for a job, I considered carefully whether it was right for me or not. But recruiters compared my level of agility with an average person, so of course they didn’t choose me” (Lam Vu, 2017).

### **Vocational training of persons with disabilities**

According to MOLISA, in terms of technical qualifications, up to 91.7% of disabled workers have no diplomas and certificates. Adult PWD’s literacy rate is only 76.3%, while less than 46% of people with severe disabilities are literate. Young PWD (15-24%) face more disadvantages in education. Their literacy rate is 69.1%, lower than that of adult PWD (UNFPA, 2011).

According to Luong Phan Cu, Chairman of the Vietnam Association for Sponsoring the Disabled and Orphans, PWD’s enrollment in vocational training meets many challenges, such as their families’ unwillingness, their low self-esteem and reluctance to participate in vocational training because of their low educational level, and the society’s lack of confidence and the belief that vocational training for PWD does not work. Textbooks and teaching methodologies for PWD also face difficulties due to different degrees and types of disabilities (Lam Vu, 2017).

Regarding types of occupation, vocational centers often prefer basic, simple but repetitive techniques requiring meticulousness. Since 2004, students with disabilities have been taught a number of occupations, such as cooking,

waitress, cleaning and cleaning (Gia Dinh Specialized School), making nylon brooms (Center for Education of Children with Disabilities), tending for trees (Binh Minh Specialized School) (Pham Hoang Nam Huan, 2004). By the beginning of 2011, similar research results showed that schools only teach students a number of jobs such as bead making (Thao Dien Specialized School), sewing (Hope School of District 6, Thi Nghe Center). These jobs are suitable for their level and cognitive ability but are difficult to find employment, students end up serving at the school where they study, working at home or continuing to depend on others (Pham Hoang Nam Huan, 2011). The representative of Nghe An Center for Education and Vocational with Disability also said that only about 50-60% of graduates find jobs, the rest move to other occupations (Mai Hau, 2015).

Several other physical and geographical factors are hindering PWD's apprenticeship. The comprehensive and integrated program of PWD support in Da Nang 2013-2015 has opened many professional vocational training classes in the formal system in order to support PWD's livelihoods. However, these classes are ineffective because few people participate because of difficult transportation, unsuitable vocational training equipment, vocational training facilities far from PWD's residence (Van Thanh Le, 2016).

Thus, it can be seen that PWD's livelihood activities are facing many difficulties due to factors from the legal environment, social environment and their own capacities. PWD have poor livelihood capitals and lack funding to invest in production and entrepreneurship to generate income. Most disabled workers are poor (49.4% of PWDs live in poor and near-poor households), many of their loans fall into bad debts. Most PWDs cannot cover daily expenses. They and their families face many difficulties. About 80% of PWD in urban areas and 70% in rural areas are dependent on their families, relatives and social assistance. 82.2% of households with PWD can only meet the basic needs for food, accommodation, and clothing for PWD (Institute of Social Labor, Haans Seidel Foundation, 2015).

## 2. Introduction on policies and programs on livelihoods of persons with disabilities

It is found that the system of legal policies related to PWD's livelihood assistance is quite adequate: Article 59, Article 61 of the Constitution 2013 on creating equality of opportunities for PWD to enjoy social welfare, social security system, policy support, education and vocational training; Article 12 of the Labor Code 2012 on supporting employers employing a significant number of PWD employees; Chapter V of the Disability Law 2010 on vocational training and employment; Article 5 of Decree 28/2012/ND-CP on encouraging socialization policies for establishments and individuals creating jobs for PWD; Article 6 of the Vocational Education Law 2014 regarding incentives for PWD in apprenticeship; The Project on Supporting people with disabilities in the period of 2012-2020 aims to provide vocational training and create jobs for 250,000 PWD in the working age.

According to current regulations, vocational training institutions reserved exclusively for PWD are given priority for granting convenient locations, capital support, training expenses, tax exemption and reduction, and loans with preferential interest rates. Other vocational training institutions enrolling PWD in apprenticeship and skill advancement programs will be given priority for investment and ensured training expense norms. Up to now, the whole country has over 1,000 establishments participating in vocational training for PWD, with over 20 centers in Ho Chi Minh City. PWD participating in apprenticeship are considered for scholarships, social allowances, tuition exemptions and reductions based on the level of disabilities and diminished working capacity.

In addition to the above support policies, the State has taken other measures such as establishing a national fund for employment, regularly organizing job fairs, including a dedicated area for PWD, attracting of many enterprises and vocational training institutions since 2006. It can be said that every year there is an increase in employment opportunities for PWD.

### **3. Missing gaps in policies and programs**

#### **Missing gaps in implementing the policies**

According to MOLISA, only 1.3 million PWD have been granted certificates of disabilities (accounting for 18.7%), meaning only a small percentage of PWD are officially receiving preferential policies of the State. Gaps still exist in disability categorization standards. PWD categorizations only cover physical disabilities or impairments, not taking into account the ability to perform basic functions in the interactive relationship between health conditions, individuals' contextual factors, and the surrounding environment according to the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Framework for Functionality, Disability and Health (ICF). On the other hand, applying ICF standards will lead to major challenges to the problem of social assistance budgets and social security support (SSS).

In fact, policies have not been implemented uniformly and are largely dependent on the local budgets of the provinces and cities. In Nghe An, there is still no preferential policy for businesses employing PWD, but only the preferential policy in obtaining loans from the National Fund for job creation (Mai Hau, 2015).

At the Collaboration in international cooperation to promote the implementation of the rights of people with disabilities Workshop by MOLISA and Caritas-Germany (2017), the leader of the Center for Tomorrow said: "Despite Ha Noi granting us priority of land allocation, our Center's application for funding to build facilities from an organization provided that the land use right certificate was submitted. Due to procedural problems,, it has not been processed for decades." In addition, this leader also said that some vocational training programs are entitled to funding from the budget, but it is difficult to access, and if available, the disbursement is very slow.

The Labor Code contains provisions related to PWD, which are applicable only to formal economic sectors and generally not applicable to informal sectors (ILO, WHO, UNESCO, 2010, p.23 ). Access to SSS policies such as social

insurance and health insurance is extremely difficult because those policies do not have specific incentives for PWD. Only 10.8% of PWD have social insurance (of which 8.7% of PWD participate in compulsory social insurance, 2.1% participate in voluntary social insurance), while nearly 90% of PWD do not have social insurance, 31% not having health insurance, mainly due to the lack of financial capacity from unstable employment and low income (Nguyen Khang, 2016).

### **Challenges in carrying out the programs**

Recently, the Government and non-governmental organizations have paid much attention via livelihood and self-employment support schemes and programs for PWD. In general, these schemes and programs have had a certain impact on improving the livelihood and lives of PWD. However, due to many limitations and shortcomings in access to support policies for businesses, these efforts have not been impactful or sustainable.

The project “Supporting livelihoods for people with disabilities and orphans” (2013, in Hung Chinh commune, Vinh City) was implemented to support 15 PWD households to raise chickens, pigeons, and cows for reproduction; 07 households were supported to build houses and sanitary facilities as well as for grocery trading. Because sales are low, some households have changed their products to suit the market. Those unable to change are stuck with their current life. Phan Thi Yen shared, “It is already very difficult to learn and practice a vocation, but if you can’t sell the products you make, it would make life even more challenging because now you’re in debts” (Ngan Ha, Duc Son, Xuan Loi, 2017).

The same situation happens in Nghe An. Garment and mushroom are two prioritized professions for Nghe An Vocational Training and Employment Center for People with Disabilities. Finding output for current products is still completely spontaneous and challenging. Product promotion and consumption organization have not received sufficient interest and investment. At the present, the Center’s clean mushroom and wood-ear mushroom products are

still available for sale in many small markets throughout the province (Mai Hau, 2015).

In Dak Lak, in order to scale up and create more jobs for PWD, in 2015, Phuong Thu applied for a loan from the Viet Nam Bank of Social Policies but had not been approved. They had to borrow 400 million dong independently. Even though according to regulations, an employer with 30% or more PWD employees shall receive preferential policies on financial support, tax exemptions. Phuong Thu mostly employed PWDs, however, the company had not been entitled to any preferential policies. Similarly struggling to proceed are their tax exemption and reduction application and the request to implement the Project on Supporting Vocational Training & Livelihoods for PWD in collaboration with the Provincial association sponsoring PWD and orphans since 2015.

Similarly, since 2011, Van Mung Wooden Fine Arts (Buon Ma Thuot City) has provided vocational training and job creation for PWD, sometimes up to six disabled workers. The owner said that vocational training and job creation for PWD are much more challenging than for able-bodied people, requiring extra attention to their health, accommodation, and nutrition needs. But up to now, the company had not been entitled to any preferential policies and incentives (Nguyen Xuan, 2017).

#### **4. Recommendations**

Based on several other countries' program implementation experiences and the actual context of Viet Nam, it is crucial for the implementation of the community-based rehabilitation matrix model to note:

- Four factors affecting PWD's vocational training and job creation are vocational training geographical areas, psychophysiological characteristics, social issues such as awareness, barriers, mechanisms and policies. Vocational training and job creation for PWD require clear definitions of the vocational training model, attention to prepare PWD before apprenticeship such as primary education, raising awareness, and rehabilitation. PWD must be included

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in the target audience in vocational training and employment programs. At the same time, there should be PWD vocational training and job creation community-based programs.

- Expand the IT-integrated database of PWD. Currently, the database of PWD, Disability Information System (DIS) is based on CBR-Info software used by the Ministry of Health in cooperation with MOLISA, MOET in national CBR programs. An open source software for social workers to conduct the PWD reference assistance service has been established in 15 provinces and cities.

- Research to apply the CBR index developed by WHO and IDDC in 2015 in VietNam. In particular, the livelihood component is assessed based on primary indicators (rate of self-employed and salaried PWD earning sufficient minimum cost of living) and additional indicators (rate of PWD able to make financial decisions, know how to access financial services, know how to access the SSS system, guaranteed to be targeted in SSS programs).

- Sustainable livelihood support programs require proactive participation of PWD. The 50/50 principle means that the program supports 50%, the remaining 50% is reciprocal from PWD to ensure their responsibility and ownership.

- Livelihood support should focus on on-location self-employment, vocational training combined with informal job creation for PWD via loan support, helping PWD's sustainable economic development and community integration. This is a feasible approach for developing countries with low incomes.

- Self- and peer-support groups and organizations facilitated by social workers play a very important role in ensuring PWD livelihood, such as creating a supportive environment, providing funding, sharing experiences, highlighting positive role models, and raising advocacy voices.

- Partners in the informal SSS network for disabled workers (families, relatives, communities, civil society and charitable organizations, and philanthropists) are possible resources to thoroughly mobilize

- Besides, the State needs to restore the mechanism enforcing enterprises to recruit disabled workers at a certain rate (maybe 1%). If the quota is not met, the enterprise must pay a corresponding amount. Into the PWD employment fund. There should be a work ordering mechanism for PWD organizations, individuals, and groups, as well as a network of associations. Companies unable to hire PWD due to their business characteristics, can sponsor livelihood support for PWD.

In summary, the model of community-based sustainable livelihood support for PWD is a comprehensive intervention strategy to help PWD both have stable and suitable livelihood as well as access to SSS services. It facilitates social integration on the basis of effectively promoting local available resources, applying various support methods to improve skills and create flexible livelihoods, suitable to the conditions and capabilities of PWD, in addition to active participation of PWD.

This proposed model is based on the community-based rehabilitation matrix officially introduced by WHO, ILO, UNESCO since 2004 and in Viet Nam since 2010 towards a multi-sectoral development strategy with five main components, including: health, education, livelihoods, society and empowerment. The sustainable livelihood model focuses on capacity development to help PWD have the professional knowledge, attitudes and skills needed. With that foundation, PWD can create jobs or be employed with a certain level of income. It also requires efforts to create a supportive environment from families' and communities' awareness to financial, legal, health and social security support services.

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