

การเสริมสร้างพลังอำนาจให้แก่คนพิการ: กรณีศึกษาองค์กรภาคเอกชน  
ในการพัฒนาอาชีพคนพิการในอนุภูมิภาคลุ่มน้ำโขง

Empowerment of People with Disabilities: A Case Study in Private Sector Occupational Promotion for People with Disabilities in the Mekong Basin (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand)

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### บทคัดย่อ

การเสริมพลังอำนาจให้แก่คนพิการของภาคเอกชนในการพัฒนาอาชีพคนพิการใน C L M V T หรืออนุภูมิภาคลุ่มน้ำโขง ซึ่งประกอบด้วย ประเทศไทย กัมพูชา ประเทศไทย ลาว ประเทศไทย เวียดนาม และประเทศไทย นั้น มีจุดมุ่งหมาย เพื่อต้องการทราบถึงกระบวนการ การบริหารจัดการ และการแก้ไขปัญหาอุปสรรค ขององค์กรภาคเอกชนในการส่งเสริมและพัฒนาอาชีพให้แก่คนพิการ มีกลุ่มตัวอย่าง จำนวน 20 ราย ประกอบด้วย ผู้บริหารองค์กรภาคเอกชนเพื่อคนพิการ จำนวน 5 ราย และคนพิการแต่ล่่องค์กร องค์กรละ 3 ราย ซึ่งผลการศึกษาพบว่าองค์กรต่าง ๆ มีแนวความคิดเดียวกัน คือ ความรักในเพื่อนมนุษย์ เพราะต่างมุ่งหวังความสำเร็จผล คือ ต้องการให้สมาชิกในองค์กรของตน ผ่านพ้นปัญหาอุปสรรคที่เกิดขึ้นกับร่างกาย จิตใจ อารมณ์ และสังคม อีกด้านหนึ่งที่มีความคล้ายคลึง คือ สภาพปัจจัยแวดล้อม ภายนอกที่องค์กรภาคเอกชนไม่สามารถกำหนดได้ คือ การเลือกปฏิบัติต่อคนพิการ ทั้งในแง่การบังคับใช้ข้อกฎหมาย และทัศนคติของสังคมที่ได้สร้างความเหลื่อมล้ำ ให้แก่คนพิการตลอดระยะเวลาที่ผ่านมา

**คำสำคัญ:** คนพิการ, การเสริมพลังอำนาจ, อนุภูมิภาคลุ่มน้ำโขง

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## Abstract

This paper examines the empowerment of people with disabilities in the private sector in the Mekong Basin region consisting of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand (CLMVT). Using qualitative research methodologies, this paper aims to discern the managerial processes and procedures as well as troubleshooting strategies of private enterprises in promoting and developing careers for people with disabilities. Data was collected by in-depth interviews, from individuals from 5 private sector companies for people with disabilities and 15 people with disabilities. Data was analyzed using content analysis.

**Keywords:** People with disabilities, Empowerment for people with disabilities, and Greater Mekong Sub-region

## Background

People with disabilities are considered an underprivileged or socially marginalized group. Despite economic and social developments, the unjust and inequitable treatment of the disabled still persists. Though legislation in Thailand over the last decade has endeavored to protect the basic rights and liberties of the disabled through acts like the “Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” (CRPD 2006), a significant gap between legislation and the practical, everyday treatment of the disabled still exists. This research, therefore, aims to ascertain the mechanisms and context in which the private sector acts to

empower individuals with disabilities to live independent lives, both socially and professionally.

## **Methodology**

This paper explores the mechanisms of professional empowerment for individuals with disabilities in the private sector. Utilizing a country-by-country approach, the barriers and mechanisms are explored in the countries of the Greater Mekong Sub Region (CLMVT), which includes Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. Interviews with disabled individuals in addition to organization leaders involved in employment empowerments for individuals with disabilities in the Mekong Sub Region.

## **Literature Review and Data Analysis**

### **1. Cambodia**

In Cambodia, the NGO, Essential Personnel Cambodia (EPC), works to educate and train Cambodians with disabilities through collaborations between private corporations and government organizations. The organization focuses its work and mission for the center on the humane treatment of the disabled. This central philosophy relates to the scholarly work of Thiprat Temphert, who emphasizes the necessity of human rights and the protection of persons with disabilities as a noble value.

Interviews with Mr. Nimul Ouch, President of Essential Personnel Cambodia, indicates that the organization is highly motivated to help those with disabilities. Additionally, interviews conducted with 3 Cambodians with disabilities (Ms. Srey Neang, Mr. Phanith, Ms. Srey) have indicated that EPC has a clear process of education, occupational training and employment services.

The predominate aim of the Essential Personnel Cambodia organization is the training, education and promotion of careers for individuals with disabilities. The organization works to match individuals with jobs through education and vocational training programs, while maintaining databases of disabled individuals and potential employers. The 1994 study conducted by Vassana Tumbonpong on "Creating Opportunities for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities," found that when employers and human resource department heads are in agreement on the benefits of hiring those with disabilities in accordance with "The Rehabilitation Act of 1991," that hiring practices and employment opportunities are more effective for individuals with disabilities.

Prior to the advent of employment services specifically aimed at assisting those with disabilities, Thiparat Temphet's 2005 paper, "Human Dignity: Case Study Under International and Domestic Law," proposed a solution for potential intervention by law enforcement to insure equitable treatment for persons with disabilities. However, this issue should not only be viewed as one relating to law and

business, but also predominately as a social issue. The equitable professional and social treatment of the disabled stems largely from ingrained systems of social values. Socially minded organizations in Thailand are working to promote their missions of social welfare in national agendas. This includes the promotion of educational initiatives to increase public awareness around these issues, especially in educational institutions and business organizations with social welfare missions. The concept of “Corporate Social Responsibility” (CSR), a self-imposed regulatory mechanism that emphasizes legal and ethical compliance, figures prominently into this as well. CSR policies encourage companies to be more aware of the impact of their business on the rest of society, including on their stakeholders and the environment. By making socially minded and responsible business practices favorable both from an economic and social standpoint, businesses are incentivized to engender social missions in their corporate cultures rather than simply focusing on the numerical exactitudes of their bottom line.

## **2. Laos**

Quality of Life Association (QLA) in Laos has a similar human rights and advocacy mission as Essential Personnel Cambodia. It aims to build structures and roles for government organizations to participate in the empowerment of individuals with disabilities at every level. Beginning with home visits in the individual’s community, the organization evaluates the individual’s life and role in their community. QLA works to make families and individuals aware of the rights protecting

people with disabilities. The awareness on rights also extends to greater community outreach efforts, in which the organization works to change social perceptions in the larger community about individuals with disabilities. They work to foster relationships between disabled individuals and their community members that are built on respect and equality. Central to their mission is the larger philosophy that regardless of one's status or capabilities, all must be treated with basic human rights and that abuse, neglect or mistreatment in any capacity on the grounds of ability, race, religion is an unacceptable violation of fundamental human dignity (Narntae Meebunsark, 2009).

The administrative process for job promotion for those with disabilities in Laos was focused on the home-life situation of the individual. QLA worked to promote government involvement in the evaluation of individual's living conditions. The treatment of the individual at home and in their community and the protection of fundamental human rights was of primary concern. Moreover, QLA worked to educate individuals and their families about the rights of the disabled, while also working in a community outreach capacity to educate community members about disabilities and the equal rights of the disabled. Furthermore, QLA worked to help individuals find solutions for paying for medical expenses, locating medical specialists, and educational funding for those with disabilities from primary school through university. Resources and skills training are also provided by QLA, including wheel-chairs and skills training such as vegetables planting education, weaving from animal wool, and organizing events for the persons with disabilities according to their aptitude. QLA works

to empower those with disabilities through skills training and education, but also through improved self-esteem. In their 2001 study, Kanokwan Angkasit, emphasizes the importance of self-esteem to one's sense of value as an individual and in a community. This is further supported by the work of Samuel Pendorf (cited in Yosak Koshaikarnon, 2001:24), who emphasizes principles of human dignity and the equal treatment of all.

The leaders of QLA work to develop partnerships with the public and private sectors in addition to foreign companies in order to promote their work and mission to a larger public audience.

### **3. Myanmar**

The Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) focuses on empowering the rights of persons with disabilities using a framework of international law. MILI works to protect the voting rights and promote political participation of people with disabilities. Furthermore, they work to negotiate for government support for the establishment of businesses owned or operated by those with disabilities as well as educational programs in technology, English and print media for those with disabilities.

The empowerment of those with disabilities through MILI's initiatives can have powerful results. There has been an increased number in the graduation rates of those with disabilities as well as an increase in the number of managerial or leadership roles held by those with disabilities. This in turn leads to greater assistance for the disabled at all levels.

Therefore, MILI works to promote the political involvement of the disabled through voting. The organization also works with the government to allocate funding for the establishment of businesses for those with disabilities and educational programs that emphasize technology, English and print media, with career services for graduates. In their 2004 paper, Sunisa Billsmouth (2004: 24) emphasizes that

*"self-employment is a profession where people have the freedom to think, use their intelligence, knowledge, and personal resources to create jobs for themselves without being in an employment system because self-employment increases an individual's self confidence, empowering them to take on greater roles and responsibilities in their communities, including becoming community leaders, who can then work to empower others with disabilities."*

MILI's political initiatives do not stop at voting rights for the disabled, but also work to help individuals with disabilities get elected or appointed to public office. By having a seat on the political council, individuals with disabilities can advocate for the protection of their equal rights and policy changes.

#### **4. Vietnam**

The DP Hanoi Association or Hanoi Association of People with Disabilities is remarkable in its management of systematic activities for those with disabilities. The DP Hanoi Association has a female director, who has worked to implement a research and solution system that

systematically addresses individuals and their challenges according to categorizations of subgroups, sub-districts, and districts. These breakdowns help to create an organizational system in which information can be gathered and the individual's rights promoted. The circumstantial and situational context of an individual with disabilities is integral to being able to address and solve the unique issues they may face, while also addressing broader social challenges similarly faced by many.

At present, there are more than 3,000 members, consisting of association employees as well as the disabled whom the organization helps. These individuals work across every sector level helping to manage the DP Hanoi Association and work to establish national policies that advocate for the disabled. The structure and goals of DP Hanoi are similar to those of the Persons with Disabilities Association in Thailand.

In addition to evaluations and policy advocacy, DP HANOI also works to promote small business ownership and expansion by people with disabilities. Through their career development educational program, One Stop Service, DP seeks to provide comprehensive and timely education for career development. This method is in line with the research conducted by Jaturong Boonyaratanasunthorn (2009) on "Patterns and Guidelines for Promotion of Occupation Groups or Welfare for the Persons with Disabilities." This study examined existing structures of occupational grouping for people with disabilities and develop strategies for improvement. It discerned benefits from the division and targeted assistance of individuals in three groups based on their unique circumstances and needs.

**Form 1:** Encouraging people with disabilities to work together should have three steps:

- 1) Motivate people with disabilities to motivate them to work.
- 2) Training by practicing life skills, vocational and socialization
- 3) Promotion and development such as finding resources, developing products and services, marketing channel or create a marketing consultancy, etc.

**Form 2:** Reconstruction and promotion of people with disabilities in their careers.

The focus is on the disabled people who are not strong enough to expand their business. It should focus on reinforcing knowledge, empowerment to ensure confidence and support for career.

**Form 3:** Encouraging people with disabilities to succeed in a better career. The focus is on a relatively strong group of people with disabilities who have the capacity to expand their businesses.

Further scholarly works support the mission of DP Hanoi to promote self-employment and small business ownership as a means of improving the quality of life, welfare and independence of individuals with disabilities.

## 5. Thailand

The Redemptorist Foundation for People with Disabilities works to raise awareness about those living with disabilities in Thailand and promote dignity in their lives and treatment. The Redemptorist Foundation works across several fronts to empower those with

disabilities through employment, raise awareness among the public about the challenges of living with disabilities and advocate for the equal rights and treatment of those with disabilities.

Central to the Redemptorist Foundation's is the notion of self-sufficiency and empowerment. If an individual is able to care for themselves, then they will be able to be a more productive, contributing members of society, thereby helping others as well. Therefore, education and employment have become key to the Redemptorist Foundation's work. To date, over 4,000 individuals with disabilities have graduated from the Redemptorist Foundation's educational and job training programs. Graduates have applied for jobs across the private sector, with employment frequently in malls and companies with Corporate Social Responsibility policies (CSR policies).

A majority of the Redemptorist Foundation's work today consists of job training courses for individuals with disabilities. The Foundation services a broad demographic of individuals from across the country, with many between the ages of 17-35. They are provided with rehabilitation care, physical, mental, social and emotional support, as well as life and job skills training. Their work and mission is supported by the 2009 study by Atuporn Boonyaratantanorn, "Forms and Guidelines for Promotion of Occupation Groups or Welfare for Persons with Disabilities," which examined occupational group training and welfare for individuals with disabilities. It then provided guidance for promoting the integration of occupational groups or welfare for persons with disabilities with moral,

ethical, and psychosocial support. Furthermore, it emphasized the importance of learning and occupational training for both government and private sector jobs without cost. In many ways, the Redemptorist Foundation's work is very much in accordance with the results and suggestions of Boonyaratanaontorn's study.

The Redemptorist Foundation is the first organization to open employment services such as occupational advising and skill analysis for both the public and private sectors to those with disabilities in Thailand. They address the multidimensional challenges that people with disabilities encounter from education to occupational skills to also evaluating the mental, physical and emotional capacity of individuals to take on specific jobs.

The Redemptorist Foundation's mission and work acknowledge the fundamental needs for autonomy, personal value, equality and dignity. Their philosophy and mission is supported by the 2001 study by Suphamon Thammongsawasdi, "Guidelines for the promotion of disabled people," which found that the promotion of positive attitudes towards those with disabilities helped to increase their self-esteem and sense of value in themselves.

Another important process is the Foundation's academic unit, which is responsible for research and innovation in ways to empower and improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities. The focus on social communication also helps to produce television programs and radio broadcasts in Thailand as well.

The Redemptorist Foundation is working to expand their work and mission to rural areas, helping those in communities where resources for the disabled might be severely limited. They seek to help individuals in these communities develop networks and skills that will improve their quality of life, autonomy and occupational opportunities. They are also expanding their global reach and platform through international outreach events such as the “Workability Asia” Conference. In the future, the Foundation not only seeks to help cultivate CSR in a business organization, but also aims to help better match individuals with disabilities to careers that suit their abilities and interests.

### Conclusion

An overview of five countries in the Mekong Basin, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand, underscored the necessity of compassion in dealing with issues surrounding autonomy and occupational opportunities for those with disabilities. Acknowledging and building organizational missions that address the fundamental human needs for care, love, dignity, compassion, self-esteem and value is vital to developing strategies to assist individuals with disabilities.

Currently, a lack of enforcement, both through legislation and by law enforcement, of standards that prevent the discrimination of people with disabilities, is a significant challenge. Moreover, social factors such as stigmas and biases also serve as barriers. Organizations in the five countries studied in the Mekong Basin work to promote

educational outreach to make individuals both aware of their rights and equality in addition to occupational training. Many of the organizations studied also work with communities in an educational outreach capacity to both promote the rights of individuals with disabilities, while also helping to foster networks that empower individuals rather than allowing their disabilities to define them and their quality of life.

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