

INCLUDE US!

Good practices in the inclusion of persons with disabilities in Myanmar



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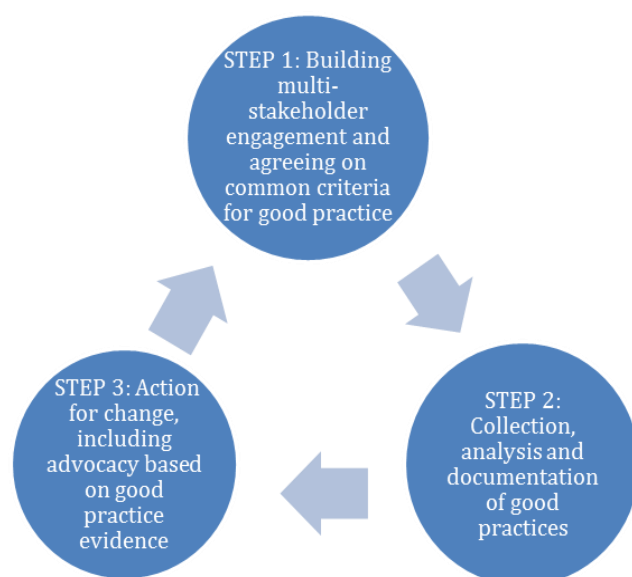
I. INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Handicap International HI began the project: “Empowering persons with disabilities to contribute to equal access to basic social services and local policy-making processes in under-resourced areas of Ayeyarwady and Mandalay”. The project supported Disabled Peoples Organizations and other civil society groups to participate in the development of inclusive regional policies and programmes, and to promote good practices contributing to greater access to services for persons with disabilities. An aim was also to document, publish and disseminate these good practices throughout Myanmar, increasing awareness and understanding in order to sensitise people to disability inclusion and influence policy change. Rather than focusing on what is not working, this report seeks to shift attention to what has worked locally and how it could be replicated in other parts of the country, providing constructive, practical recommendations to decision-makers, service providers and other community groups in Myanmar.

The Making It Work (MiW) methodology, developed by HI in 2014 to support evidence based advocacy, was chosen to support this activity: www.makingitwork-crpd.org

Methodology

The MiW methodology follows 3 steps, shown here:



Subsequently, the project has followed some key steps leading to the development of the current report. Firstly, in January 2017, a Handicap International Technical Advisor provided training on the “Making It Work!” approach to the Project team. This was followed by the establishment of a multi-stakeholder advisory committee in May, 2017, composed of 10 persons from:

- Handicap International (INGO)
- Eden Centre for Disabled Children (NGO)
- Myanmar Independent Living Initiative MILI (DPO)
- Myanmar Federation of Persons with Disabilities MFPD (DPO)
- Shwe Minn Tha Foundation SMTF (DPO)
- The Leprosy Mission Myanmar TLMM (NGO)
- The Myanmar Physically Handicapped Association MPHA (DPO)

The advisory committee brought together considerable expertise in the field of disability-inclusive development and humanitarian action. The first task of the committee was to collaboratively work together to define criteria for the selection of good practices. There followed a process of collecting, documenting and analyzing good practices from the capital Yangon, and regional areas around the country.

Twenty-four good practices were submitted to the Committee. Of these, seven practices were selected by the Committee to be researched and documented in the form of case-studies. The aim was to show effective and innovative local actions that have achieved positive changes for persons with disabilities by improving their access to services and inclusion in the community.

This report (and the production of an accompanying short video) is the culmination of that process, and an opportunity to deliver our evidence of good practices, key messages and recommendations to a wider audience.

Criteria of the Good Practices

The criteria of the good practices conform to a broader set of guiding principles and shared values expressed in a number of key documents: United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UN CRPD), and Myanmar Disability Law. In addition, the Committee defined specific local criteria of good practice that they felt reflected the unique Myanmar context. The Sustainable Development Goals were also included because of their central principle of “Leave no one behind”, which directly impacts the lives of persons with disabilities, and links to the UN CRPD.

A. Criteria related to CRPD:

Overarching Criteria: Article 3: General principles

(Respect for dignity and autonomy, non-discrimination, full and effective participation and inclusion in society, respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity, equality of opportunity, accessibility, equality between men and women, respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities)

Article 5: Equality and non-discrimination

Article 9: Accessibility

Article 24: Education

Article 27: Work and employment

Article 12: Equal recognition before the law

B. Criteria related to Myanmar Disability Law:

Chapter 4: Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and access to equal basic rights

Chapter 5: Education of Persons with Disabilities

Chapter 7: Accessibility: easy access to public transportation and public places

Chapter 8: Persons with Disabilities' Rights to Participate in Politics and Public Affairs

Chapter 10: Job Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities

C. Criteria related to the Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 4: Quality education. Make sure everybody has equal opportunities and access to quality inclusive education all through their lives.

Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth. Make sure everyone has access to employment opportunities.

Goal 10: Reduced inequalities. Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all.

Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities. Provide access to safe, affordable, inclusive and accessible public spaces and transport systems.

D. Criteria related to the Local Context

1. Be a grass-roots initiative, responding to a local community need
2. Demonstrate gender sensitivity and a change of perspective or attitude to women and girls with disabilities
3. Demonstrate creativity and innovation
4. Be inclusive, showing the capacities of persons with disabilities
5. Fit the local context and show respect for local culture and traditional way of life (accepted by the Government and community)
6. Be cost effective, sustainable and easy to reproduce (e.g. local materials, low cost, local human resources)
7. Increase visibility of Persons with Disabilities by showing their full and active participation in community life (e.g. social, cultural, religious, sport, vocational, educational, transport, etc.)
8. Show empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, and have elements of advocacy and/or awareness raising

II. GLOBAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to the government

1. Enforce and widely promote existing laws, policies and services for persons with disabilities

Recently drafted Laws and Regulations for Disability Rights need to be promptly enforced, and National government should expand their services widely in the community in order to enable the full and effective participation and inclusion of people with disability in social and community life, in line with laws and policies. Accessibility issues also need to be addressed, to make school buildings, work places, public transport and public spaces barrier free.

In many cases persons with disabilities are not accessing services because of a lack of information about existing services. For instance, many persons with disabilities in Myanmar are living without national registration cards because they do not know the importance of identity cards or they are not familiar with the process of applying for one.

2. Promote awareness of disability within Government departments

Most government departmental staff in areas such as Education, Social Welfare, Health, Labour and Immigration, are still not aware of the rights of persons with disabilities. In general, negative attitudes toward persons with disabilities are still prevalent. The government should take responsibility for promoting greater awareness of disability issues and rights among departmental staff by providing specific training on disability issues for staff and professionals in the basic social services. This is critical to improve accessibility to services. This would include training on Myanmar National Disability Laws, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals: all important frameworks for developing an understanding of disability rights and the need for effective implementation of policies.

Having sign language translators or people who can communicate with persons with disabilities (including hearing and seeing impaired people) is another key element to ensure the quality and accessibility of services.

Education is another critical area. Teacher capacity building is needed to ensure that children with disabilities are welcome in schools and that their learning is supported in ways that are individualized.

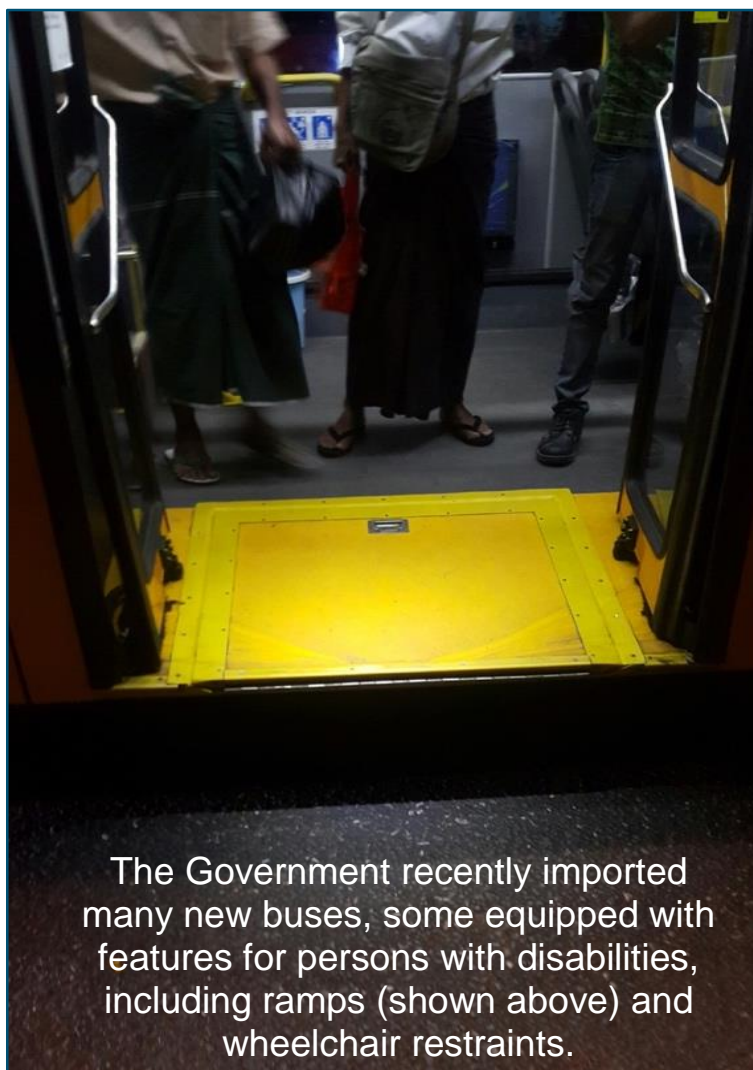
3. Support initiatives of persons with disabilities

The government should facilitate and support the initiatives of persons with disabilities and their organizations for the empowerment of the disability movement. For instance, developing a partnerships between Myanmar Federation of Persons with disabilities (MFPD) and Government could improve the access to employment and vocational training for persons with disabilities. As there are 2.3 million people with disabilities in Myanmar, according to the 2014 Census report, poverty alleviation through creating job opportunities for persons with disabilities is urgently needed.

4. Making a special case for public transport

Public transport is critical to enable persons with disability to fully participate in community life and the economy. The Committee producing this report had hoped to include a good practice in the area of creating accessible public transport, however we were not able to find a sufficiently robust example. However hopeful steps are being taken.

The state of public transport infrastructure in Myanmar is receiving considerable attention at the moment, with the newly created Government-sponsored Yangon Bus Service being established in January 2017. Many

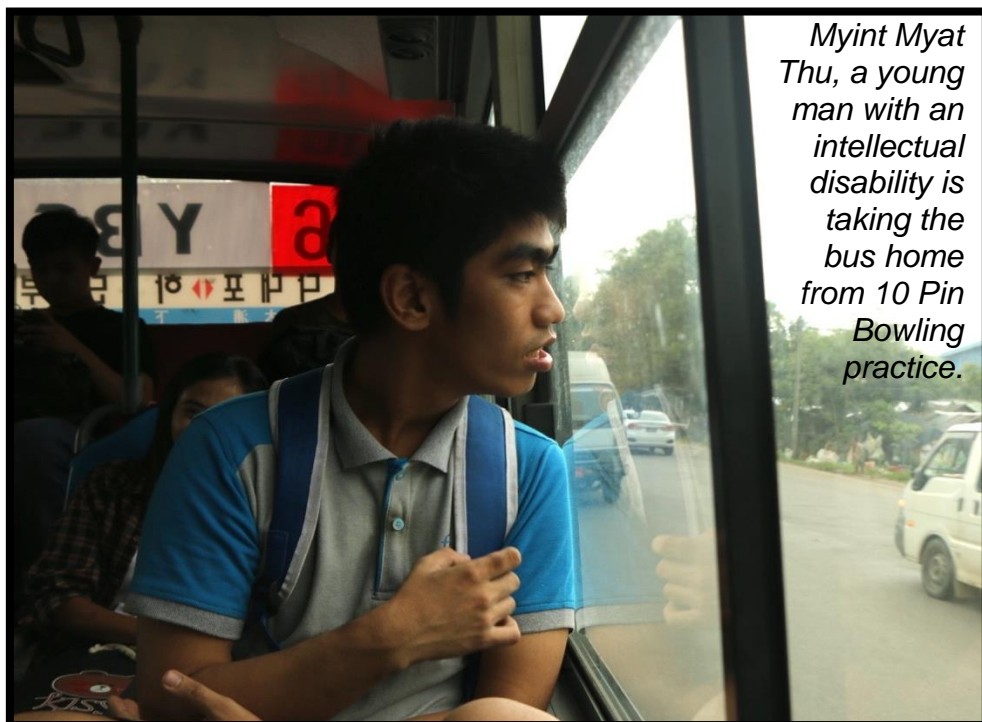


The Government recently imported many new buses, some equipped with features for persons with disabilities, including ramps (shown above) and wheelchair restraints.

new buses have been imported, some equipped with features for persons with disabilities, including ramps and wheelchair restraints, but they are not being used because the rest of the city's physical infrastructure does not allow for it, and there is a lack of awareness amongst the bus drivers and the public. A private bus company has also reported that it plans to introduce disability accessible buses at the end of the year. For its part, the Yangon City Development Committee has plans to upgrade 500 bus stops to international standards, but no timeline has been announced yet.

In 2016 the Myanmar Independent Living Initiative MILI, launched a campaign called "Make Myanmar Accessible", to highlight how the absence of disability-friendly public infrastructure in Yangon presents a fundamental physical barrier to persons with disabilities. Together with MILI, the Myanmar Federation of People with Disabilities and the Myanmar National Association of the Blind have also spoken out in the media about the need for urgent public transport reform (buses, trains, ferries, taxis).

A major advocacy and media campaign is about to be launched, supported by major Disabled Peoples Organizations and coordinated by Handicap International. The campaign will highlight the lack not only of Disability Standards and physical accessibility related with transportation, but also create awareness of the need for compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CPRD, Article 9) and the Sustainable



Myint Myat Thu, a young man with an intellectual disability is taking the bus home from 10 Pin Bowling practice.

Development Goals (Goal 11) to ensure accessibility in the delivery of transport infrastructure and services. Hopefully, this campaign will be a first step in solving public transport accessibility issues and leaving no-one behind.

Recommendations to the organizations of people with disabilities

1. Continue advocacy work and training of key professionals to ensure that services are accessible by persons with disabilities

Specific training on disability issues for staff and professionals in the basic social services is critical to improve accessibility. While training of key professionals is the responsibility of the authorities, the participation of representatives from organizations of persons with disabilities in delivering training makes it much more relevant and effective.

More advocacy work needs to be done at a policy level with the various Government Ministries, such as Education, Social Welfare, Health, and Labour and Immigration. Awareness raising activities and training also needs to be provided to Civil Society Organizations, and private employers and businesses. Sharing success stories from respected industry champions like KBZ Bank and Novotel will build trust and raise awareness with private employers.

2. Continue to reach out to people with disabilities in rural and remote areas.

Most of the advocacy work in Myanmar is currently centered in schools for children with disabilities and major towns where there is a branch of a Disabled People's Organization. This is a limitation for parents and families in rural areas, who should also have access to training, advocacy work and support groups.

More advocacy work with people with disabilities and their family members is needed. There continues to be stigma and shame attached to having a child or family member with a disability. Families need to be supported to see that children and adults with disabilities have fundamental rights to the same opportunities as everyone else and empowered to demand the right to live a life with dignity and autonomy.

III. GOOD PRACTICES RELATED TO EDUCATION

Case Study I

Promoting Inclusion of children with disabilities in Middle Schools of Ayartaw

Organization/stakeholders: The Leprosy Mission Myanmar; 3 Middle Schools with disabilities inclusive measures

Location: Ayartaw, Sagaing Region

Scope: Regional

Context

In the 2015 Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, there is a chapter on education of persons with disabilities, which affirms the right of each person to receive a quality education. Section 24 states that children with disabilities must have opportunities for early childhood care and access to free education, to the level that is allowed by the Ministry of Education at State schools in their village or in the nearest area. In 2016 the Government of Myanmar released the National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021 which focusses on nine key areas, including improvements in access and inclusion to ensure the fulfilment of the human rights of children with disabilities. A 2016 UNICEF publication “Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities in Myanmar”, found that while inclusive education was initiated in 2010, there remain significant barriers to its implementation, and 67% of children with disabilities were not in school. The report also reported that children with an intellectual disability were less likely to go to school than children with physical disabilities because of a general perception that they would not benefit from an education.

Description of good practice

In Kan Yin Village of Ah Yar Taw Township, Su Thinzar, a six year old girl with cerebral palsy, can now go to school. This is possible because of advocacy work that involved close coordination, communication and negotiation between civil society organizations, international non-government organizations, the education department, the legislator for the region and the family.

The Leprosy Mission Myanmar supported physical therapy, medical support, barrier free renovation and provided assistive devices through its rehabilitation centre in Ah Yar Taw Township.

The Middle school of Kan Yin village, where Su Thinzar now studies, was initially not willing to accept her because they felt burdened by the paperwork they would need to complete, and were unsure of how to approach her education. This was changed because the legislator urged the school to accept her and the Leprosy Mission also supported her with a special wheelchair, to facilitate transport and accessibility.

Additionally, there are another two mainstream schools that children with disabilities can now attend, following advocacy work from the Leprosy Mission and close coordination, communication and awareness raising with families, community officials and teachers. There are three students with disabilities in one school and four in the other. The Leprosy Mission has supported renovating the school buildings to be barrier free and also supported children by providing wheel chairs, crutches and prosthetic legs for the students.

Significant Changes

- According to the Leprosy Mission, they have been able to assist 51 children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools. They have done this by working closely with families, schools, teachers and other community officials. A strength of Ah Yar Taw Township is that the Member of Parliament from this area is a strong supporter of inclusion and has been a powerful partner to disability organizations and families, including submitting disability related motions in Parliament.
- Generally the Leprosy Mission has found teachers to be strongly supportive of having children with disabilities in their classes. There has been no significant discrimination from the teachers or their fellow students, with the children with disabilities being included in all school activities. Ko Aung Moe Zaw from Leprosy Mission said “When there is a heavy rain in our area,

teachers even carry children with disabilities on their back and carry them back to their home.”

- School entrances and toilets were renovated with ramps to be barrier free.
- Departments coordinated to provide good outcomes for students. Eg. when there was a child with a suspected hearing impairment, the Leprosy Mission and the school teacher cooperated to secure a medical check-up.

Su Thinzar, who has Cerebral Palsy, is pictured here attending a mainstream school



Challenges and Advocacy work

Some teachers are not willing to accept the children with disability at their schools because they do not want to do an extra paper work for a child, who may fail in exams or have more absences than other children. This is despite Section 23 of Myanmar Disability Law stating that “When a person with disabilities applies at a school, apart from matters concerning the subject’s requirements, his/her application must not be rejected on the ground of their disabilities”.

When children with disabilities pass middle school, they potentially move to another school to attend high school. This can result in repeated accessibility challenges and barriers, as the new school administration and teachers get to know the students and family.

More advocacy work needs to be done at the policy level with Ministry of Education to ensure teachers become more aware of children with disabilities and better understand their rights to a quality education. Accessibility issues also need to be addressed, to make school buildings barrier free, and provide capacity building for teachers to ensure that children with disabilities are welcome in schools and that their learning is supported in ways that are individualized.

Case Study II

How the development of the teacher training promotes inclusion of all children in education.

Organization/stakeholders: Eden Centre for Disabled Children (ECDC); Ministry of Education

Location: Yangon

Scope: National

Context

Before 2015, there was no specific legislation to protect and ensure the rights of persons with disabilities in Myanmar. ECDC and other disability related organizations initiated advocacy work to develop the first Disability Rights Law (2015) and an amendment to the National Education Law (2015). Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals also focuses on ensuring ‘inclusive and equitable quality education for all’, and describes children with disabilities as a group, which needs special attention.

According to the Ministry of Education report from 2010-2011, “there were 801 disabled children in mainstream schools, 1450 children in special schools for the blind and the deaf, 30 disabled students in universities/colleges (with 6 students in master degree courses)”.

Description of good practice

Since 2006 ECDC has implemented the “Education for All” project, which focuses on promoting Inclusive Education. The project aims to collaborate with all stakeholders at all levels of the education system, to strengthen policy and practice related to inclusive education, and to promote the new education legislation and reforms.

The project provides capacity building training for teachers. This increases their understanding and acceptance of education as a right for children with disabilities, strengthens their inclusive practice by training them to effectively

engage and teach students with disabilities, and encourages them to become strong advocates for policy change.

At an individual level, during the 10 years of the Education for All project, 250 children with disabilities (the majority of them with physical disabilities), were able to access mainstream education in their own communities within Yangon (in 10 townships: Hlaing Thar Yar, Shwe Pyi Thar, Htan Ta Pin, Inn Sein, Hlaing, Mingalardon, Bahan, North Dagon, North Okkalar, Mayangone), by being provided with transportation, school materials, basic medical needs, assistive devices, barrier free renovations, etc.

Significant Changes

- In 2016/2017 more than 88 teachers from 50 mainstream schools have been provided with training on disability and inclusive education.
- 250 children with disabilities have been able to access inclusive education in 50 mainstream schools in 10 targeted townships of Yangon. Among them more than 200 children with disabilities were given stipends for educational expenses by Department of Basic Education (DBE), in line with new policies.
- The 50 targeted mainstream schools in the ten targeted townships of Yangon are now equipped to become inclusive schools, which accept children with disabilities, and provide quality education through trained teachers and specialist teaching and support staff.
- The Ministry of Education's "National Education Strategic Plan (2016-2021)", provides a commitment to inclusive education, and education for children with disabilities is identified as an education sector reform priority.
- The National Education Policy Commission was recently formed, and an expert related to inclusive education was included.
- Currently, Ministry of Education is planning to adopt pre- and in-service training for teachers to build capacity on disability and inclusive education.

Challenges and Advocacy work

The Myanmar Ministry of Education is supporting the development of education systems that are responsive to and inclusive of children with disabilities. However, even though a school can be a disability inclusive mainstream school, children with disabilities from rural and suburban areas are facing challenges to get to the school because there is no transport and often the distance to school is long.

Teaching methods in mainstream schools of Myanmar tend to be didactic and exam-oriented. Even if the teachers have the skills and commitment to engage students with disability, challenges exist in adapting education policies to be inclusive of student diversity with regard to assessment formats, exam times, grading systems, etc.



“I had to take more time in taking my examinations in my school life. I also did not have good marks as I did not have good hand writing. This discrimination makes it hard to persuade parents of children with disability to send them to school.”

*Ko Htay Aung,
Program Coordinator from Eden Centre for Disabled Children,
a person with cerebral palsy who attended a mainstream school.*

IV. GOOD PRACTICES RELATED TO ECONOMIC LIFE

Case Study III

How partnerships between private companies and organizations of people with disabilities can improve access to employment and vocational training

Organization/stakeholders: Myanmar Federation of People with Disabilities; Future Star; Novotel; Yangon Bake House; KBZ Bank

Location: Yangon

Scope: National

Context

The Myanmar Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was passed in 2015, and states that all citizens shall enjoy equal employment opportunities. Chapter 10 includes provision to ensure job placement by introducing a quota system in all public and private sectors, and also offering tax incentives to organizations, companies and private business owners who employ persons with disabilities. Despite this, employment rates for persons with disabilities remain far lower than for people without disabilities. According to the 2014 Myanmar Census report, fewer than 2% of people with disabilities are graduates, and only 15% engage in any livelihood activity.

The major challenges to obtaining employment are poor education and vocational training opportunities; lack of technical assistance, transportation and accessible workplaces; and negative attitudes of employers. However, the Myanmar Federation for Persons with disabilities (MFPD) is working with Government and Non-Government agencies to change all that.

Description of good practice

The Myanmar Federation of Persons lobbied to be given the position of vice chairperson (along with Minister of Social Welfare) on the National Disability Rights Committee, to provide a strong voice and platform for the disability sector to inform government policy. The MFPD also set up its own committee for employment affairs in May, 2016.

The MFPD works on advocacy, education, and awareness-raising in Myanmar. They coordinate with private sectors like KBZ bank, OK Dollar and other companies, to negotiate work placements for persons with disabilities. It focuses on job opportunities for both formally and informally educated persons with disabilities. As word about the new initiative spreads, some private companies are now contacting the MFPD looking to hire people with a disability.

MFPD also offers awareness raising programs to companies to inform them about Myanmar Disability Law and legislation, to promote the skills of persons with disabilities, and dispel some of the myths, e.g. that people with disability

Nyein Chan Luu, who has learning disabilities, is pictured working as a steward in Novotel Hotel.



require special tools and technology to be able to work; that the person with a disability will need to bring a helper with them and the employer will need to pay double wages, etc.

Significant Changes

- Through its advocacy and awareness raising, the MFPD reported that they successfully placed 90 persons with disabilities in jobs from March 2016 to March 2017.
- The Yangon Bake House, a non-profit social enterprise focusing on empowering disadvantaged women, decided to offer training apprenticeships to women with disabilities. The Deputy Operations Manager commented, “We decided to start this initiative and contacted the Training School for Children with Disability, run by the Department of Social Welfare, and KBZ Brighter Future Foundation. We now have a woman with Down Syndrome on our training program.”



- The Novotel Hotel has hired 12 persons with disabilities and they are intending to hire more in the future. Nyein Chan Luu is one of persons with disabilities currently working in Novotel Hotel. At first, he faced a lot of difficulties because of his inexperience. However, he overcome this with the support of his mother and training and supervision provided by Novotel. He has been working there for 2 years now and has gained important life and work skills. These skills will help him secure a lasting career in the hospitality industry.

“His job has changed him a lot in better ways.

Now, he has more confidence because he has a job and income.”

Daw Khin Mar Aye

(Nyein Chan Luu’s mother)

- One of Myanmar’s largest private banks, KBZ Bank, has hired 23 persons with disabilities, to work in branches around the country, including in Yangon, Mandalay Region and Taunggyi, Shan State.

Challenges and Advocacy work

Discrimination against people with disabilities is still widespread in Myanmar, with many employers believing that people with disabilities are not able to work. To overcome this, MFPD needs to continue raising awareness with employers and businesses. Sharing success stories from respected industry champions like KBZ Bank and Novotel will build trust and raise awareness with private employers.

The challenges of finding employment for people with severe disability will always be greater. By cooperating with employers and considering flexible working hours, in accordance with capacity of persons with disabilities, could be a solution.

Education and vocational training in Myanmar can also be more disability inclusive, so people with disabilities have opportunities to develop needed job skills. To increase job opportunities the government should look at recruiting persons with disabilities to civil servant positions.

V. GOOD PRACTICES RELATED TO SOCIAL/COMMUNITY LIFE

Case Study IV

Giving the Myanmar Deaf Community access to information

Organization/stakeholders: Myanmar Deaf Community Development Association MDCDA, Department of Social Welfare, MRTV Myanmar Radio and Television, Democratic Voice of Burma.

Location: Yangon

Scope: National

Context

Before sign language was consolidated, there were two localized dialects of sign language used in Myanmar: one from Mandalay and one from Yangon. In 2010, the Department of Social Welfare implemented a project in collaboration with JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) to combine these two dialects into a new sign language: Myanmar Standard Sign Language. The aim was to have a common shared language that everyone feels comfortable using, and which facilitates communication and social inclusion.

The right to information is crucial for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. They have the same right as anyone to access important information such as the daily news, weather forecast, community service announcements (e.g. disaster warnings) and information related to legislation and law, which has a significant role in Myanmar, a country in transition from military rule to civilian democracy. All this information needs to be interpreted into sign language which is considered a 'mother tongue' for persons who are deaf.

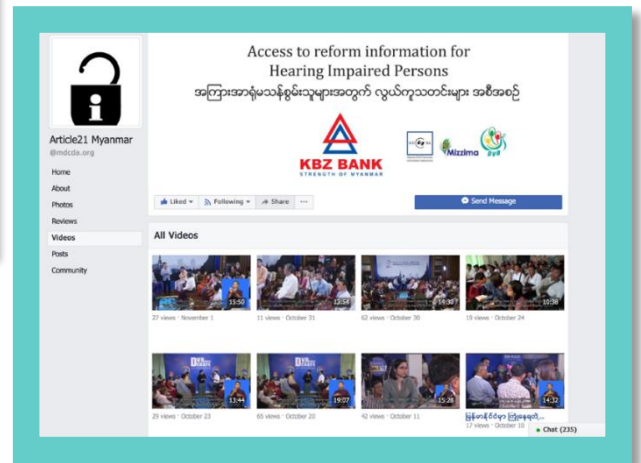
Description of good practice

While the Department of Social Welfare is supporting the Deaf community's access to information by having sign language interpretation on Myanmar Government television news broadcasting (8 o'clock evening news), the Myanmar Deaf Community Development Association MDCDA is also focusing on making interpretation available for other current affairs. MDCDA provides signing for DVB (Democratic Voice of Burma) TV debate program, where a lot of topical issues are discussed.



A screen shot of MRTV's 8 o'clock news bulletin, with evidence of Myanmar standard sign language interpretation being provided in the corner.

A screen shot of the Facebook page called 'Article 21' where all the Debate sessions and other current news are interpreted into Myanmar Sign Language by MDCDA.



Besides this program, MDCDA has also interpreted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and is planning to interpret Myanmar Disability Rights Law and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities. These initiatives mean that persons with disabilities have more access to information through the inclusion of sign language interpretation in these TV programs, and materials available on the internet.

Significant Changes

- MDCDA has formed strong collaborative working relationships with other organizations and schools within the Deaf community. It is not interpreting the

Conventions and legislations alone. As some of the words have no signs, discussion is needed to get agreement on how to sign new words such as “Violence Against Women”. Consultation is important as these signs will be used by the deaf community as a whole.

- These sign language interpretation services are helping consolidate the use of the new Myanmar Standard Sign Language. As more TV programs and materials are interpreted using the standardized sign language, those who were used to former localized dialects are now becoming familiar with Myanmar Standard Sign Language.
- JICA, MDCDA and Department of Social welfare are working together to provide 3-day basic sign language training to deaf persons, their parents and relatives, in 12 different regions of Myanmar, including Yangon, Mandalay, Lashio, Taunggyi and Mawlamyine. This further expands the reach and recognition of the Myanmar Standard Sign Language, facilitating access to information, and the improved social participation of deaf and hard-of-hearing persons in Myanmar.

Challenges and Advocacy work

To make sure the Deaf community has access to important information, well trained Myanmar Sign Language Interpreters are needed. For this, Department of Social Welfare has a comprehensive program for sign language training. This program takes one and half years including an internship.

As Myanmar Standard Sign Language is newly developed, there are many words that have not yet been interpreted into sign language. This makes the interpretation of the MRTV news difficult, as interpreters often face new words that are hard to sign. In this case, they contact MDCDA and consult with a Myanmar Sign Language expert like U Tin Aye Ko.

*U Tin Aye
Ko is a deaf
person and
also a MSL
interpreter
for
MDCDA's
interpreting
documents
and Article
21
Facebook
Page.*



Another challenge is that some of the local DPO and non-government organizations cannot provide sign language interpretation for their workshops and awareness raising sessions as they do not have sufficient budget for this. In this case, people who are deaf and want to participate can face a lot of difficulties.

Additionally, DSW does not have enough Sign Language Interpreters to cover the needs. More sign language interpreters need to be trained, so that Government, non-government and international non-government agencies can ensure that sign language interpreters are provided for all events that people who are deaf wish to attend.

Case Study V

How parental advocacy can make a difference

Organization/stakeholders: Future Star, Bowling Alley

Location: Yangon

Scope: Regional

Context

A 2016 UNICEF publication “Situation Analysis of Children with Disabilities in Myanmar”, found that most parents/caregivers reported receiving little assistance from the community, with regard to health, financial or routine services for their children with disabilities. For some, the task of raising a child with a disability was fraught with barriers and seemed overwhelming at times, with parents feeling they were initially unprepared to care for and promote their child's development and inclusion.

The UNICEF study found that there was, among all community members, including parents and caregivers, “a persistent and deeply rooted lack of understanding of education as a right all children have, including children with disabilities – as evidenced by misconceptions associated with the need for special schools, not to mention the traditionally accepted charity model of disability” (pg 35).

It is not surprising then that some families experience children with disabilities as a burden and have lower expectations of them, finding it difficult to be strong advocates for their children's rights to health care, education, and later employment.

Description of good practice

Myanmar has many Disabled People's Organizations and parental support groups, such as Future Star, Myanmar Autism Association, Intellectual Disabled

Children Family Network, Myanmar Down Syndrome Association, Eden Centre for Disabled Children, among others.

These groups provide information, support and resources to families who have children with disabilities. Parents are empowered to help their children and each other, by exchanging information about topics that are important to them: rehabilitation and education, what kind of medical support they could get from which organizations, inclusive community programs, employment options, how sports and exercise could help improve their children's health and wellbeing, etc.

Future Stars is an example of a strong self-advocacy group for intellectually disabled adults. The group was formed by parents and trainers in 2010. Its main objective is to train adults in vocational programs so that they can earn money, and create a platform for them to speak out about their rights.

Significant Changes

- Daw Khin Mar Aye is a mother of two children with disability. Her younger son has an intellectual disability and her older boy has a learning disability. Through parent-to-parent support at her children's school when they were younger, and through involvement with Future Stars, she has become a strong advocate for her children. Her younger son is a champion in 10 pin bowling and has won medals in the Special Olympics. Her elder son is employed in the hospitality industry and works at the Novotel Hotel. "I did not know anything about disability at first", she said. "Later, I had a chance to meet with other parents at my son's school and saw how I could change my ways and do things differently to improve my sons' lives."

Myint Myat Thu, a young man with intellectual disability is practicing 10 Pin bowling for his upcoming competition.



- I trained them to do work starting from the small tasks at our home. They can fry their eggs, wash their dishes and so on. The best way is to give them your trust and build their confidence. So then, they can stand on their own,” Daw Khin Mar Aye said.

Parents’ informal catch-ups, and formal sharing through training workshops and meetings, can make a huge difference and change the attitude of other parents. Parents are the ones that spend the most time with their children and who know their children best. It is important that they are at the center of all services and supports, and feel empowered to advocate strongly for their children to ensure they have access to all the experiences and opportunities that other children have.

Challenges and Advocacy work

Most of the advocacy work in Myanmar is currently centred in schools for children with disabilities and major towns where there is a branch of a Disabled People’s Organization. This is a limitation for parents and families in rural areas, who should also have access to training, advocacy work and support groups. Future Star is now planning to extend the coverage of its awareness program and reach out to more rural areas.

Daw Khin Mar Aye stated that, “Sometimes people, even the parents, are forgetting that our children are also made of flesh and blood. They also have desires. We forget to give them sex education.” Sex education for children with disabilities should also be considered in awareness raising and educational programs.

Daw Khin Mar Aye and her two sons



VI. GOOD PRACTICES RELATED TO POLITICAL LIFE

Case Study VI

Community advocacy in obtaining the National Registration Card

Organization/stakeholders: Shwe Minn Tha Foundation; Immigration Department.

Location: Ayeyawady Region, Yangon

Scope: Regional

Context

Every country has its own mechanisms to identify and confirm citizenship and Myanmar uses a pink card, also known as the National Registration Card (NRC). This card is crucial for all Myanmar citizens, because it allows one to travel freely, register with institutions (such as a bank), provide right to employment and, most of all, vote in elections.

In Myanmar, according to the 2014 Census report, there are 2.3 million people with disabilities (4.6%), with the Ayeyawady region having the highest proportion of disabled people in the country (7.64%). This is due in part to the devastating impact of Cyclone Nargis in 2008. No data is available for numbers of persons with disabilities who have a National Registration Card and are eligible to vote.

Various complicated steps need to be taken in order to get a NRC, such as filling in numerous forms and going to an Immigration office many times until the final card is issued. In this complicated process, people with disabilities are often neglected. Sometimes family members and/or government officials think it is

unnecessary for a person with disabilities to be issued with a card. Other barriers like road infrastructure and transportation, especially in rural areas, have also had a high impact on the number of people with disabilities trying to obtain a NRC.

Description of good practice

In 2015, the Shwe Minn Tha Foundation began a project in Ye Kyi Township in the Ayeyawady region of Myanmar to support persons with disabilities receive more assistance, vote in the elections and play a wider role in their communities. According to 2014 Census report, in Ye Kyi there are 7,937 people with living with disabilities, in a general population of 106,070.

Quarterly workshops, called “Multi Stakeholders Working Group” Meeting, were implemented by Handicap International and Shwe Minn Tha Foundation staff, funded by EU, inviting civil society organizations and government departments in the area, to discuss disability rights and Myanmar Law and legislation. Organizations and Government departments started to be aware that equal access to basic social services is a right for all people, and the Immigration Department agreed to make NRC cards for persons with disabilities. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) is also planning to provide a benefit to people with disabilities, who will need a disability registration card to receive cash transfers. Having a NRC card will facilitate and simplify the process of obtaining a DSW disability card in the future.

To help them work more efficiently and simplify the registration process, Immigration Department staff asked the Shwe Minn Tha Foundation to arrange meetings with all persons with disabilities in each village. The Foundation facilitated this participation by providing transportation, covering costs, and giving any other necessary support to persons with disabilities and their families so they could participate in these meetings and apply for their NRC.

“No matter if a person is disabled or not, one who is eligible to be a Myanmar Citizen can have a NRC card.”

Head officer of the Ye Kyi Immigration Department.

Significant Changes

- An initial group of thirteen people with disabilities came together to obtain their pink National Registration Card in October 2015. This meant that they were able to vote in the historic National Election of November 8th, 2015.



San Zaw Htwe (with his mother) who received his NRC card for the first time when he was in his late 30s, explaining how he received this card in 2015

- Since then, as a result of ongoing awareness raising activities by the Shwe Minn Tha Foundation, the Ye Kyi immigration department now routinely asks whether there is a person with disabilities in the community or not.
- If they are informed and receive a request from a civil society organization or an individual, they voluntarily visit the village or house where the person with disabilities lives, and supports their application for the Card.
- Currently 20 people with disabilities from the Ye Kyi Township have already obtained their National Registration Card and the number is rising. Shwe Minn Tha foundation is strengthening the scope of this project and coordinating with other government departments in the Ye Kyi area.

Challenges and Advocacy work

Family members often consider having a National Registration Card unnecessary for persons with disabilities and are unwilling to cooperate with the application process. More advocacy work with people with disabilities and their family members is needed to make them aware of the benefit of having a NRC card, and the broader understanding that they have fundamental rights to have the same opportunities as everyone else and the right to live a life with dignity and autonomy.

The Immigration Department work force is limited and not able to offer all persons with disabilities individual home-visits to make their NRC. Gathering people together in a central place, close to their home or village facilitates the registration process, but the question of financial support to do this and sustainability of this practice needs to be considered.



Zin Mar Aye from Ye Kyi Township, who has a congenital condition, is shown here making bamboo hats which are sold in the market. She received a NRC in 2015 and for the first time was able to vote in the historic Myanmar elections that year.

Case Study VII

Supporting people with disabilities to participate in Myanmar elections

Organization/stakeholders: Myanmar Independent Living Initiative; Electoral Commission

Location: Yangon; Nay Pyi Taw

Scope: National

Context

In Myanmar, persons with disabilities have traditionally experienced exclusion from political participation due to physical and attitudinal barriers. The Myanmar Disability Law, which was passed in 2015, enshrined the right of persons with disabilities to fully and effectively participate in political life, including voting in elections. However, as a result of a lack of awareness and accessibility of polling stations and voting systems, many persons with disabilities were at risk of being denied their right to take part in the historic general elections of November 2015.

Description of good practice

The Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) began promoting disability access in Myanmar elections prior to the 2012 by-election. They initiated a survey and hosted workshops around the country about how to include persons with disabilities in political participation. They continued their disability inclusion education before the 2015 National election with a project entitled: Promoting Disability Access in Myanmar Elections. They worked closely with the Union Election Commission, responsible for organizing and overseeing elections in Myanmar.

Their approach included awareness raising sessions and training, for all Government sectors (ranging from the central committee to the grass roots level of Government), as well as working with persons with disabilities and their

families and the general public to raise awareness through workshops and the distribution of voter education materials, including a video and awareness theatre.

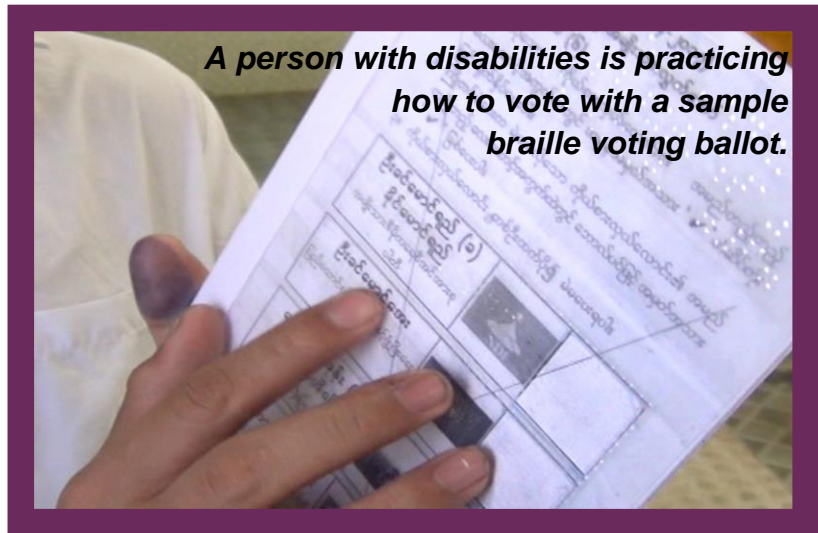


*A person with disabilities came out of the Disability Inclusive Polling Station smiling and happy after he voted independently in Hlaing Thar Yar Township (Myanmar).
Photo: MILI*

Significant Changes

- An amendment of electoral regulations was made promoting disability inclusion, a chapter on disability rights was included in the polling officer's guide book, and inclusions about mainstreaming disability rights were included in the related chapters of the 2014 and 2018 Union Election Commission's 5 years strategic planning documents.
- For the 2015 National Election, 18 disability accessible polling stations were created, especially for people with visual impairment and/or physical impairment, and 9 disability accessible polling stations were created for the 2017 by-election. This was the first time in Myanmar's history when persons with disabilities were encouraged and supported to participate in the political space. The introduction of a pre-voting system for persons with disabilities also facilitated participation.

- In 2015, a special Braille voting system was created, part of the very first pilot project in South East Asian countries, enabling a person with a visual impairment to vote confidentially and independently, without needing assistance from other people.



- All election workers were offered capacity building training around creating disability inclusive services so they were able to successfully advocate and facilitate the participation of persons with disabilities in the election process.
- Media exposure resulted in greater awareness and consideration of disability rights and access to political processes in different sectors of Myanmar society.
- MILI worked to ensure that the 2015 and 2017 elections were the country's most accessible and inclusive elections to date for persons with disabilities. There was an increase in the percentage of persons with disabilities voting and participating in political life in the elections of 2015 and 2017.

Challenges and Advocacy work

Even though there were obvious achievements and greater numbers of persons with disabilities participating in the political process, a post-election survey made by MILI in 2015 revealed that disabled persons continued to experience discrimination in numerous ways, and some officials considered facilitating their political participation to be a burden and felt it was not essential to include their voices in the political change election process in Myanmar.

MILI has continued to advocate in this area, working on consultation meetings with politicians and political parties, and providing recommendations from Disabled Peoples Organizations. Policy tool kits have been produced to guide inclusive electoral processes in Myanmar, and these were distributed to every parliamentarian in the states and regions of Myanmar. The kits included information on the rights of people with disability to vote and participate in political life, and how to create disability friendly infrastructure in public places.

VII. CONCLUSION

Through the “Making it Work” methodology, it was possible to identify some promising good practices for persons with disabilities living in Myanmar. Specifically, this report provided seven case studies encompassing the areas of education, livelihood, community and political life. Each one of them has illustrated the important collaboration of various stakeholders from civil society, as well as the public and private sectors, working together with Disabled Peoples Organizations.

These seven documented good practices show effective and innovative local actions that have improved inclusion and meaningful participation of persons with disabilities by improving their access to services and inclusion in the community. The challenge now is to build on or scale-up these examples, by establishing how similar initiatives could be replicated by other communities in the linguistically, ethnically, culturally and geographically diverse landscape that is Myanmar.

While not without its challenges, the potential for positive action to advance the social, economic and political inclusion of persons with disabilities, at both an individual and a societal level, is enormous, as these case-studies have shown. All the selected good practices are evidence-based, cost effective, sustainable, and inclusive. We would strongly encourage the replication of the good practices which are detailed in this book, throughout the rest of Myanmar.

INCLUDE US! GOOD PRACTICES IN THE INCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN MYANMAR

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