

The ILO's commitment to promoting opportunities for persons with disabilities in training and employment dates back eighty years to the early days of the Organization. For those of you who are not familiar with the ILO, it is a specialised agency of the United Nations, set up in 1919, before the UN came into being. It differs from other UN agencies in that it is a tripartite organization, involving governments, as well as our social partners - employer organizations and worker organizations. The involvement of the social partners ensures that issues affecting people at every level of society are brought to attention – particularly in relation to the world of work.

Decent Work is ILO's primary goal for everyone, including people with disabilities. The ILO, and in particular, its disability programme has worked for over 50 years to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities, based on the principles of equal opportunity, equal treatment, mainstreaming and community involvement. The principle of non-discrimination is increasingly emphasised, as disability issues have come to be seen as issues of human rights. The ILO works to achieve this goal through promoting labour standards, through advocacy, knowledge building and technical cooperation services and partnerships, both within ILO and externally.

ILO standards relating to disability:

Convention No.159

- adopted in 1983, at the start of the UN Decade of Persons with Disabilities
- now ratified by 78 countries
- 11 new ratifications since 2000, - a reflection of the level of priority which governments attach to disability issues.
- Recommendation 168 – accompanies C159, giving guidance on its implementation
- Recommendation No. 99 concerning Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons dating from 1955
 - a stand-alone recommendation which was before its time in proposing mainstreaming training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities, where appropriate
- The Code of Practice 'Managing Disability in the Workplace' 2001
 - adds to the range of standards which the ILO uses in its work to promote the employment of disabled persons.
 - It reflects the significant changes which have taken place in the understanding of disability, and in legislation, policies and services concerning disabled persons since 1983.
 - It is an agreed, non-binding, set of rules and procedures on this topic. While non-binding, if Employers accept the code, they should be willing to implement all of the rules and procedures it contains.

An example of ongoing ILO technical cooperation is the project "Alleviating Poverty Through Peer Training" (APPT) in Cambodia. Based on informal and village-based apprenticeships the project uses a methodology called success case replication.

According to this methodology successful entrepreneurs train others to replicate their business by imparting practical skills in both the technical and business aspects of setting up the micro business. After training, the project provides small grants, loans and business development services to project beneficiaries so that their dreams for a better life become reality. The ILO cooperates in this project with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour, Vocational Training and Youth rehabilitation and with an international NGO the World Rehabilitation Fund. This village –based approach has been successful and has proved to be particularly suited to people with disabilities in rural areas whose barriers to formal training often take the form of low literacy skills, limited mobility and transportation options and a general lack of resources. One major lesson learnt from this project is that challenges can be met through simple, yet creative low-cost solutions.

Tok Vanna, 32, double hand amputee was a land mine victim since 1990 when he was soldier. After disabled, Vanna returned to his home village where His wife took care of him because he could not do anything, his family lived in extreme poverty. In 1994, Vanna came to Phnom Penh seeking for job and fortunately he was employed by a NGO as guard until 2002. In 2002, Vanna moved with his family to Siem Reap and as he could not find job there, one solution to survive was to beg. In 2003, he was selected by APPT project for a skill training in books selling from another disabled books vendor named Sem Sovantha. After the completion of the training, a Japanese named Ito Satoshi generously gave him some seed money to buy books for selling and the APPT project gave him a loan to buy a cart to carry the books and a small special allowance to pay for English lessons which enable him to communicate with his clients. In addition to the books, Vanna is selling also silk scarves, T-shirts and some souvenirs items. Vanna is making a good business earning a net income about \$ 65 per month. With this income, one part, he uses to buy new books for his business and another part to pay house rental and to support his family. So now, with this business, his living condition is much more improved.

Another ongoing project promoting income generation for people with disabilities is the project “Developing Entrepreneurship among Women with Disabilities” (DEWD). This project has developed a strategy to support women with disabilities and women with disabled dependents in improving their standard of living through improving access to mainstream training in micro-enterprise skills and vocational skills as well as access to credit and business development services. A key element is the involvement of the Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) and women with disabilities in the project management and in carrying out the project activities. DEWD started in Ethiopia and has now expanded to Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. In Ethiopia beneficiaries have included women in the Tigray region who were disabled as a result of the armed conflict.

Based on the long experience from technical cooperation projects the ILO has developed several tools to support employment creation. Examples of tools specifically regarding entrepreneurship development is “Start your business” which is a course designed for new entrepreneurs, introducing the basic elements of starting and managing a new business and “Improve your Business” which is a training package that focuses on ways to improve the performance and productivity of businesses.

The ILOs Crisis Response and Reconstruction Programme (CRISIS) have been working with disabled ex-combatants in several countries, namely in Afghanistan, Angola, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, Palestine and Zimbabwe. The work of the Crisis programme aims at influencing actors involved in crisis situations to place employment concerns at the forefront of their efforts and promote the recovery and reintegration of affected communities. The projects undertaken within this programme have assisted governments, agencies, NGOs and Disabled Peoples Organisations to provide vocational skills training for disabled ex-combatants. Projects have often included counselling and rehabilitation. The CRISIS programme has contributed to the recently published Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (IDDR) standards, a set of policies, guidelines and procedures for UN-supported demobilization and reintegration programmes (DDR), jointly drafted by six UN agencies. An operational guide to the standards has also been published. Presently a guide on the Socio-Economic (Re) Integration of Ex-combatants is under preparation. The guide explains a number of employment related initiatives, including a section and tool on issues to be considered in reintegration programmes for ex-combatants with disabilities.

The “Training for Rural Economic Empowerment” (TREE) is a programme providing skills training and economic development to rural communities. It builds on the ILO’s “Community Based Training” approach which has been successful for over 20 years in rural, isolated and poor communities in Asia, Africa and Latin-America. TREE is an approach to skills development that differs from conventional vocational training programmes in three ways: by identifying potential income generating activities before determining training needs, by involving local community and social partners at all stages and by ensuring follow-up support for the beneficiaries. TREE projects have been implemented among others in Cambodia and Nepal and are ongoing in Pakistan and the Philippines. The programme has developed a “Decision Makers’ Guide” and a “Generic Manual” that provides information to implement TREE and to use elements of this approach to complement other development programmes.