

Standing Committee on Victim Assistance, Socio-Economic Reintegration and Mine Awareness (SC-VASERMA)

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Topic: Implementation of the Standard Rules on Full Participation and Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Cambodia

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Introduction

Firstly, may I thank you for inviting me to share our experiences on implementation of the United Nations Standard Rules on Full Participation and Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Cambodia with you. I and my colleagues, who have assisted in preparing this paper, hope that we can contribute to the development of improving full participation and equal opportunities for people with disabilities including landmine victims.

I am speaking here on behalf of the Disability Action Council (DAC), a semi-autonomous national coordinating body composed of relevant Government Institutions (Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women and Veteran's Affairs, and others), International and Local NGOs who are working in the disability sector including Cambodian Disabled People Organization-CDPO, Business Sector and Religious Community which has been set up mainly to assist the Government of Cambodia to effectively fulfil its mandate as recognizing the UN Standard Rules on Full Participation and Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities (PWDs) and being a signatory to the ESCAP Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 1993-2002. (Please see attachment of DAC Relationship Chart).

The **DAC's vision** reflects to the implementation of the UN Standard Rules on Full Participation and Equalization of Opportunities for PWDs which is "Individuals and society recognize that PWDs have equal rights and obligations as all citizens of Cambodia. PWDs are given equitable opportunities to participate in the society, based on their abilities, enabling them to lead a life free of discrimination".

The **DAC's mission** is to initiate, secure and co-ordinate the programs/services necessary for PWDs and their rights to enjoy full participation and equal opportunities for employment and quality of life as others in the society.

Efforts Undertaken under the DAC Framework

By recognizing all countries are at different stages of development and face different internal situations, especially in a country such as Cambodia, we strongly believe that the effective implementation of the UN Standard Rules can be achieved through working at different levels while developing parallel streams in a coordinated and systematic manner. At the top (national) level the focus is on the development and implementation of national policies and planning to include the rights and responsibilities of PWDs and at another level the focus is on the support and empowerment of the national organizations such as CDPO, NCDP, etc.

Through the established structure and mechanisms of the DAC (please see attachment of DAC Organizational Structure) which Technical, Specialized Committees and Working Groups formation comprised of representatives from relevant Government Institutions, International and Local NGOs working in the disability sector, Business Sector and Religious Community, we can make recommendations and fit into the development and implementation of policy and planning of the Government of Cambodia. People with Disabilities are represented within all Committees and Working Groups.

For example:

- ⇒ *Inclusive Education for children with special needs: In cooperation with Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, and other relevant NGOs through DAC Children with Disabilities Committee, policy, planning, programs and institutionalization within the existing education system have been developed and implemented for long-term sustainability. Policy must also take into account poverty, assistive devices, community support, etc.*
- ⇒ *Legislation: Draft has been developed through the Legislation Specialized Committee to ensure the rights and obligation of PWDs in fully participating and having equal opportunities in society.*
- ⇒ *Disability awareness: National strategy on disability awareness raising covering all government ministries, NGOs, business and religious bodies can assist in changing the attitudes and behavior of society towards PWDs.*
- ⇒ *Women with Disabilities: Policy and strategic plan focusing on specific needs and empowerment of women with disabilities are being developed through Women with Disabilities Committee in close cooperation with Ministry of Women and Veteran's Affairs.*
- ⇒ *Medical Rehabilitation: Similarly, planning and concrete action has been taken to promote this area of development through the Medical Rehab Committee in collaboration with Ministry of Health.*

Through our link with UN bodies such as UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, WHO, FAO, etc, we are also able to link into global trends and knowledge to assist in the development and implementation of the policy and planning of the Government.

By providing assistance and support to as well as working with local NGOs, in particular CDPO and NCDP, we can provide and or promote full participation and equalization of opportunities for their work in advocacy and capacity building which is also recognized by the Royal Government of Cambodia.

In a country such as Cambodia, where government ministries are still struggling to stabilize with limited technical, financial and equipment resources, and where there are thousands of PWDs with low or limited capacity who need to be "empowered" to develop their capacity to become more involved at all levels of decision making through the structure as mentioned above. These are critical factors to be recognized. Different strategies and mechanisms need to be employed.

Another strategy is to raise the status and awareness of PWDs in Cambodia by linking with international organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, WHO, FAO, etc. through the process of joint workshops so that greater awareness and understanding of the situation of PWDs is being taken into account thereby being part raising the awareness and needs of PWDs.

Other effort is the formulation and implementation of a comprehensive National Plan of Action for the Disability and Rehabilitation Sector based on the UN Standard Rules and ESCAP Decade

of the Disabled Persons which embraces 15 components covering almost all aspects of disability issues including Advocacy, Disability Awareness, Prevention of Disability, Education, Training and Employment, Rehabilitation, Community Based Rehabilitation, etc. Most components are being responsible, developed, updated, and progress will be monitored and evaluated by the Specialized, Technical Committees or Working Groups.

Challenges Faced:

- ♦ Recognizing that the level of poverty in Cambodia is under the poverty scale and so basic needs should be met, such as food, shelter, access to land, etc.;
- ♦ As similar to other post-conflict countries, there is a tendency to focus on the economic issues rather than social issues.
- ♦ Recognizing that parallel streams need to be adopted that respond to emergency situations while laying the foundation for longer-term development and sustainability;
- ♦ Recognizing that capacity building of national people, at all levels, is the foundation of long-term sustainability and empowerment;
- ♦ Recognizing that strategies and mechanisms should be geared towards engaging PWDs at all levels of decision-making;
- ♦ Recognizing that in Cambodia, in the early stages of stabilization, the government is under-resourced both financially and technically while NGOs implement services. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt different models/approaches whereby all resources can be mobilized in a coordinated systematic way and it is necessary to promote the spirit of community.

* Let me finish by saying that the successful and effective implementation of the UN Standard Rules can only be guaranteed by a collaborative and coordinated partnership involving relevant government ministries, IOs/NGOs, the business and religious communities and PWDs.

We have attempted to give a brief overview of what has happened in Cambodia during the past 4 or 5 years. We hope that our experiences would contribute, in some ways, to the implementation of the UN Standard Rules being developed in other countries.

Thank you for your attention.

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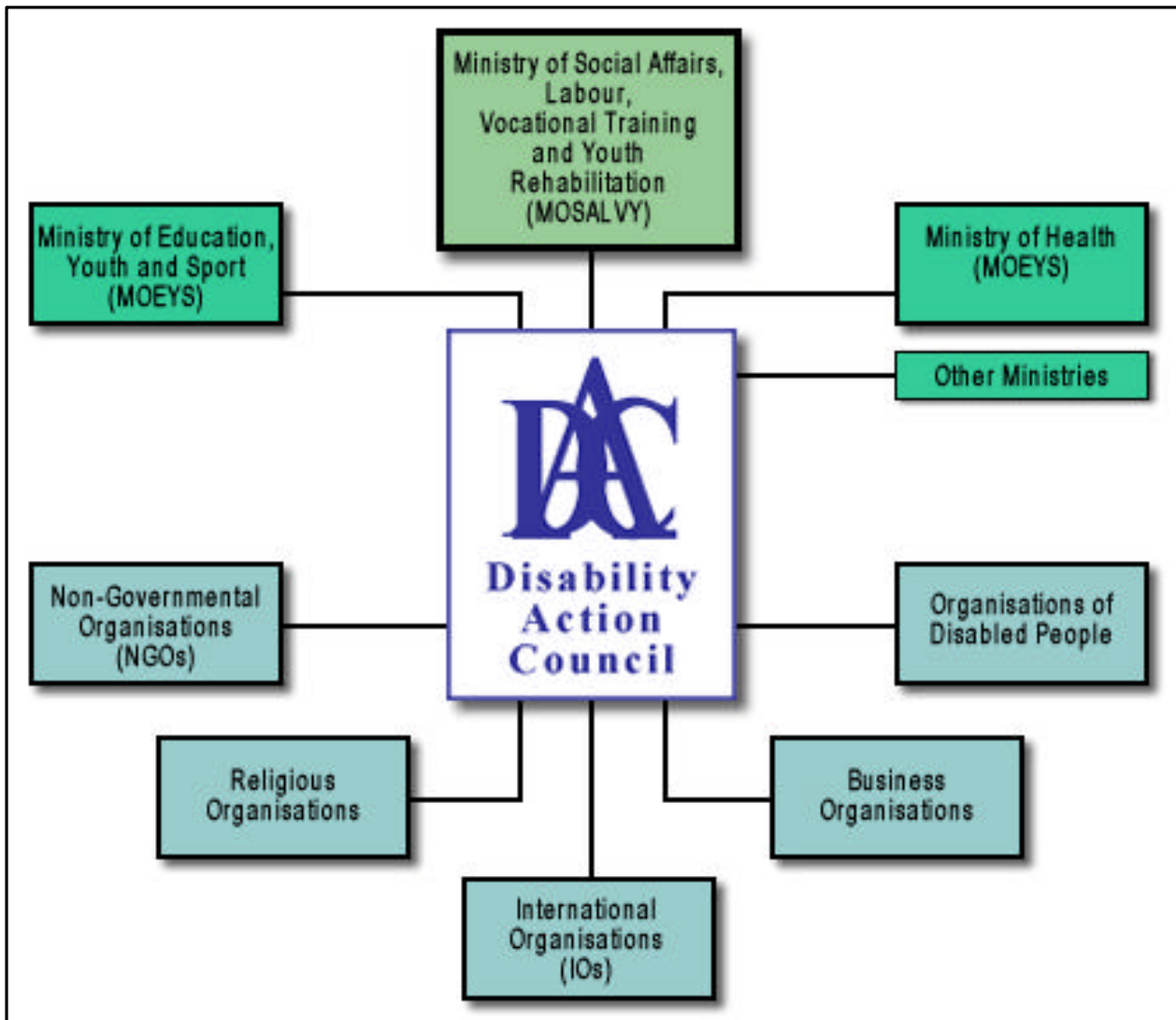
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DAC Relationship Chat



The DAC Organizational Structure

