

Disability, Livelihood and Poverty in Asia and the Pacific

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The cover design is reflective of the varied data landscape and multifaceted nature of disability data. Many parameters interplay in the process of data collection thereby creating a wide-spectrum of estimates. This book acknowledges the diversity in definitions, purposes and methodologies, as embodied in the strong contrasts in detail and colour.

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Acknowledgements

This publication was prepared by the ESCAP Social Development Division, under the overall direction of Nanda Krairiksh.

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The following organizations of, and for, person with disabilities were partners in the participatory research at the national level: Commitments, India; Pacific Disability Forum and the Fiji Disabled Peoples' Federation, Fiji; Japan Disability Forum (JDF), Japan; Association of Women with Disabilities 'SHYRAK', Kazakhstan; Kabalikat ng Malayang Pilipino (KAMPI), Philippines; Korea Disabled People's Development Institute (KODDI), Republic of Korea; Special Talent Exchange Programme (STEP), Pakistan; Universal Foundation for Persons with Disabilities, Thailand. These organizations undertook data collection and analysis, and contributed inputs for this publication.

The report was substantively edited by San Yuenwah.

The cover and layout of the publication were designed by Daniel Feary.

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Abbreviations

DFID	Department for International Development
DPO	Disabled people's organization
ESCAP	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ILO	International Labour Organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Note

When country names are cited, the reference is specific to the respondents surveyed.

Introduction

This publication on *Disability, Livelihood and Poverty in Asia and the Pacific* is an executive summary that draws from a wider body of primary and secondary research undertaken by the ESCAP research team. It considers both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions which shape the livelihood experiences of persons with disabilities. The primary research is derived from collaboration between ESCAP and its national research partners: disabled people's organizations (DPOs) and organizations for the empowerment of persons with disabilities.

Research informing this publication involved addressing a number of significant challenges that apply to all research on persons with disabilities. The major challenge is that, despite progress in parts of the Asian and Pacific region, in general, persons with disabilities tend to be unseen, unheard and uncounted. This is due to the tenacity of barriers to their participation in mainstream society and development programmes. The barriers manifest as negative stereotyping and discriminatory attitudes and behaviour, as well as the general inaccessibility of the physical, information and communication environment, as experienced by persons with disabilities. At the same time, some families feel a need to protect persons with disabilities from the curiosity of strangers, especially when disability affects the physical appearance and/or behaviour of a family member. Mitra (2005) has noted that the stigma associated with disability within communities can create barriers to even identifying persons with disabilities, especially those with psychosocial disabilities. There is thus an imbalance of research, with some forms of disability being more extensively covered than others. Furthermore, research teams may not have the skills and experience for transcending difficulties in interacting with specific groups, such as persons with hearing and speech impairments, persons with intellectual disabilities, and deafblind persons. These are important contributory factors that result in a scarcity of evidence. The lack of evidence, especially evidence that is derived from the voices of persons with disabilities themselves, in turn limits policy options.

Yet there are many opportunities for inclusive and empowering research, particularly when it encourages the voices of persons with disabilities to be heard, or when it engages DPOs and persons with disabilities themselves as active partners in the research process and not merely as objects of study. An emerging trend in disability research recognizes that the research process itself can give voice to persons with disabilities, build community understanding of the issues faced by persons with disabilities and their families, and feed information “upwards” to influence policymaking.

Several studies clearly demonstrate the strengths of research in which persons with disabilities are at the centre (for example, Fisher, 2008; Graham et al 2006; and Yeo and Bolton, 2008). Such research actively seeks to empower persons with disabilities by involving them as fully as possible in research design, implementation and interpretation. It also seeks to change community attitudes and practices in favour of the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The present study contributes to such knowledge generation and sharing, and provides the basis for action which empowers persons with disabilities and their organizations, and supports their inclusion in development processes. ◆

The study

Action research, as part of the work of ESCAP on disability, livelihood and poverty, was conducted over the period from January to August 2012. This included a survey carried out in eight countries of the Asian and Pacific region, namely: Fiji; India; Japan; Kazakhstan; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Thailand. In all, there were 1,768 respondents to the survey, 58 per cent of whom were men and 42 per cent of whom were women (*Table 1*). There was a balance of respondents from both urban and rural areas. All the respondents were persons with disabilities.

The research was inclusive of all forms of disability that varied across the participating countries (*Figure 1*). The research methodology emphasized the participation of persons with disabilities and encouraged the articulation of their voices. In great part, access to persons with disabilities was facilitated by the fact that DPOs, including persons with disabilities themselves, conducted the research.

DISABILITY AND POVERTY

The relationship between disability and poverty has often been referred to as a vicious cycle.

Poor people with disabilities are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability, each being both a cause and a consequence of the other.

DFID, 2000, p.1

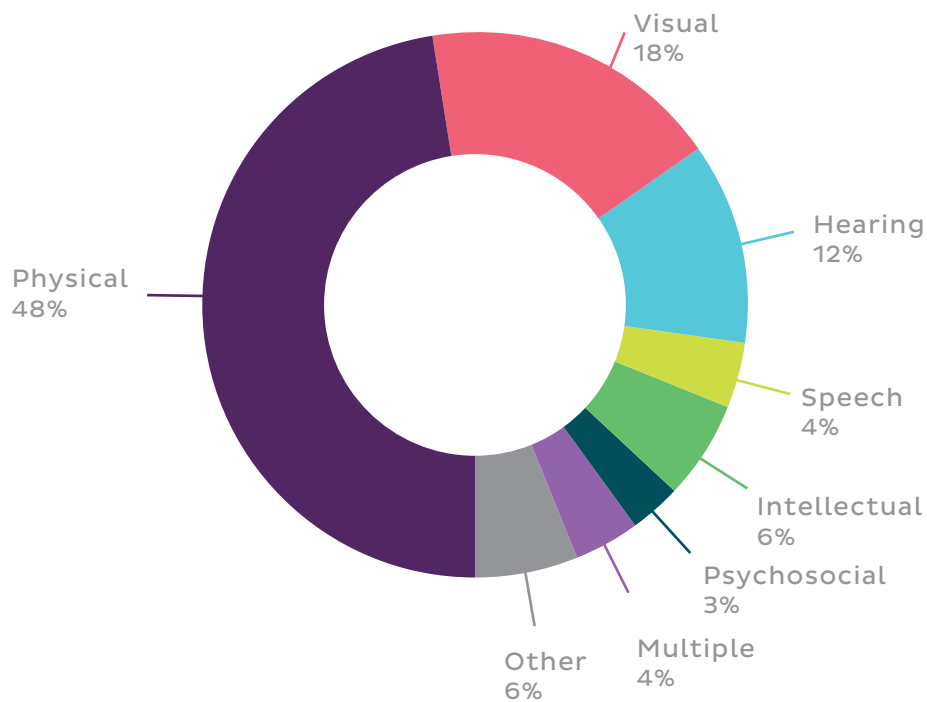
Of course, not all persons with disabilities are poor or even significantly disadvantaged, but research has shown that a person with a disability is more likely to be poorer than a non-disabled person (Mitra, 2005).

The World Bank has estimated that persons with disabilities may have accounted for as many as one in five of the world's poorest (Elwan, 1999). Disability may also result from poverty: the causes of disability reported in the ESCAP survey included preventable diseases and conditions, such as poliomyelitis, leprosy, malnutrition, bacterial infections, poisoning, as well as medical malpractice and birth- and delivery-related trauma. The Department for International Development (DFID), of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has quantified the link between disability and poverty by estimating that up to 50 per cent of disabilities are preventable and directly linked to poverty (DFID, 2000, p. 3). Disability is a development issue, because of this bidirectional link to poverty: disability may increase the risk of poverty, and poverty may increase the risk of disability (Sen, 2009).

TABLE 1. NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

	RESPONDENTS (NUMBER)	MEN (NUMBER)	WOMEN (NUMBER)	MEN (PERCENTAGE)	WOMEN (PERCENTAGE)
Fiji	183	114	69	62	38
India	230	128	102	56	44
Japan	128	92	36	72	28
Kazakhstan	240	122	118	51	49
Republic of Korea	154	92	62	60	40
Pakistan	200	105	95	52	48
Philippines	273	161	112	59	41
Thailand	360	211	149	59	41
TOTAL	1 768	1 025	743	58	42

FIGURE 1. TYPES OF DISABILITY OF RESPONDENTS



However, the relationship between disability and poverty should not be viewed as inevitable. The *2011 World Report on Disability* has presented a nuanced reality suggesting that, “Empirical evidence on the relation between disability and poverty in its various dimensions (income and non-income) differs greatly between developed and developing countries with most of the evidence from developed countries.” (p. 39). The Report has further noted that, while persons with disabilities experience lower employment rates and lower educational attainment rates than persons without disabilities, developing country data on the probability of being poor as a result of having a disability are mixed (p. 40). The ESCAP survey-based action research also shows mixed evidence on relating income alone to poverty and the inability to make a livelihood (*Table 2*).

TABLE 2. RESPONDENTS’ ABILITY TO MEET LIVELIHOOD NEEDS (PERCENTAGE)

	CAN MEET LIVELIHOOD NEEDS	CAN MEET LIVELIHOOD NEEDS, BUT WITH DIFFICULTY	UNABLE TO MEET LIVELIHOOD NEEDS
Fiji	6	50	44
India	8	78	14
Japan	35	54	10
Kazakhstan	15	80	5
Republic of Korea	6	47	47
Pakistan	13	84	3
Philippines	25	47	27
Thailand	41	39	20
AVERAGE	19	60	21

In spite of the above findings, research in developing countries has shown that disability is significantly associated with multidimensional forms of poverty, which persons with disabilities experience at higher rates and severity than persons without disabilities (Mitra et al, 2012). Disability can further contribute to poverty by hampering the full participation of persons with disabilities in the economic and social life of their communities, essentially limiting the range of support structures on which they may fall back on. Disability may also affect access to services and income support programmes that do not reach persons with disabilities, either as individuals or through household and family access to social protection schemes.

Women, children, adolescents and older persons with disabilities, persons with extensive psychosocial disabilities and persons with multiple disabilities are often identified as the most vulnerable in this regard (Lwanga-Ntale, 2003; Stubbs and Taiwake, 2009; and Shang et al, 2011). However, these associations are far from clear-cut across time and space. The diverse and situation-specific nature of disability, the multidimensional nature of poverty and the complex relationship between poverty and disability necessitates, in turn, more research. This is especially the case for a better understanding of relationships between disability, livelihood and poverty beyond income or any other single variable as the causal factor. Research examining the relationship between disability and poverty must not only describe, but also explain the experience of poverty in order to account for relationships where disability is both a cause and a consequence of poverty. Moreover, it must account for what this experience means for individuals, families, communities and nations.

The research outcomes linking income poverty and disability varied across the action research undertaken (*Table 3*). Nevertheless, it is notable that despite the inclusion of both developing countries and those that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a significant majority of respondents indicated that their income was not enough to support themselves. Only in Japan did a majority of respondents indicate otherwise. Across the survey overall, only 471 of 1,280 respondents (36 per cent) indicated that they had a level of income which could meet their needs. This is despite the existence of social security and income-support schemes in several countries covered by the survey. ♦

TABLE 3. RESPONDENTS' INCOME SUFFICIENCY FOR SELF-SUPPORT (PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	27	73
India	43	57
Japan	66	34
Kazakhstan	22	78
Republic of Korea	19	81
Pakistan	30	70
Philippines	36	64
Thailand	44	56
AVERAGE	36	64

Households, disability and poverty

Having a person with a disability in a household increases the incidence of household and individual income poverty. Likewise, household poverty is more likely to limit the access that persons with disabilities have to basic services, education and financial support. Family members in poorer households are also less likely to be aware of specific forms of support, programmes and even their entitlements and rights.

The gap between having an income and being able to meet livelihood needs is magnified in the case of persons with disabilities who have to support dependants.

In the research, it was evident that a considerable number, almost half, of persons with disabilities were supporting dependants (Table 4).

In some cases, this included a large number of family members: on average, 3.6 persons in Fiji and 3.1 persons in the Philippines. This is a significant research outcome, one that raises important issues for further research, and for policy making.

Research findings indicate that, in those cases where persons with disabilities support dependants, there is an enormous gap between income poverty and an income that suffices for fulfilling support responsibilities (Table 5). This was evident across all countries to a great degree of uniformity and despite varying levels of national socioeconomic development.

This too is an important research outcome. It not only indicates income poverty and the related stress that it imposes on persons with disabilities, but also broader household and intergenerational dynamics. Access to services and income is therefore critical for family, rather than just individual, well-being. By not addressing the needs of persons with disabilities in households where there are dependants, intergenerational poverty may result, affecting also persons without disabilities. ◆

TABLE 4. RESPONDENTS WITH DEPENDANTS TO SUPPORT

	YES (PERCENTAGE)	NO (PERCENTAGE)	AVERAGE NUMBER OF DEPENDANTS
Fiji	74	26	3.6
India	53	47	2.5
Japan	24	76	1.6
Kazakhstan	44	56	1.8
Republic of Korea	60	40	2.1
Pakistan	19	81	2.4
Philippines	56	44	3.1
Thailand	31	69	—
AVERAGE	44	56	2.4

TABLE 5. RESPONDENTS WITH SUFFICIENT INCOME TO SUPPORT DEPENDANTS
(PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	20	80
India	20	80
Japan	29	71
Kazakhstan	8	92
Republic of Korea	8	92
Pakistan	25	75
Philippines	20	80
Thailand	27	73
AVERAGE	20	80

Livelihood, disability and poverty

It is often claimed that there are strong and direct relationships between disability, poverty and the livelihood-related challenges that persons with disabilities face. Much of the recent research linking poverty and disability has shown that persons with disabilities are among the most marginalized in society (for example, Elwan, 1999; Yeo, 2001; Braithwaite and Mont, 2008; Palmer, 2011; and World Health Organization, 2011). The most common reasons are limited educational attainment and employment opportunities. The combination of these two key indicators of livelihood results in a much greater likelihood of economic and social exclusion. It is the disabling impact of inaccessible and unsupportive environments on the potential and functioning of persons with disabilities, which is argued to be the principal determinant.

The complex nature of such links is not well understood. It most certainly varies by context, as well as type and extent of disability and degree of access to services needed. Social norms can greatly restrict the livelihood options open to persons with disabilities—particularly when the restrictions result from prejudice, discrimination and exclusion. This impacts not only persons with disabilities, but also their families. Addressing sociocultural barriers involves strengthening the understanding of disability among the general public and policymakers.

The interplay of complex and multidimensional relationships between poverty and disability result in social and economic marginalization, and limit the livelihood opportunities of persons with disabilities. Yeo and Moore (2003) have attempted to represent these relationships diagrammatically, as seen in *Figure 2*.

There is a need for research that provides deeper and more reliable insights into ways of meeting the livelihood needs and aspirations of persons with disabilities. This includes generating a better understanding of how persons with disabilities are able to manage and even overcome the multifarious physical, social and cultural barriers that prevent them from accessing essential services, securing decent employment and realizing adequate livelihoods. There is a need for wider use of research methodologies that value the voices of persons with diverse disabilities in articulating their own experiences, as part of an inclusive research agenda.

DEFINING AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON DISABILITY AND LIVELIHOOD

What does this mean for research on disability, especially in relation to poverty and livelihood? This requires shifting away from a singular focus on disability to seeking

to understand the relationship between persons with diverse disabilities and the sociocultural, economic, physical and information and communication context which shapes their experiences. Through this shift, research can move away from approaching persons with disabilities as a homogenous group of passive objects of study to engaging them as active research partners in understanding and acting on their own needs. Ultimately, outcomes from such research can only deepen understanding and broaden the policy options for more effective reduction of the many barriers that persons with disabilities struggle with. The box item that follows is illustrative of some of the barriers that persons with disabilities face in a developing country context.

THE LIVELIHOODS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Over the past decade, the concept of “livelihood” has been used to describe an important dimension of the relationship between disability and poverty. In their international study of poverty, Narayan et al (2000a and 2000b) defined livelihood in terms of the well-being derived from the adequacy and security of income and food.

Adequate and secure livelihoods emerge as a central concern to poor people’s well-being ... poor people often struggle to diversify their sources of income and food....

Narayan et al, 2000b, p. 45

Livelihood, however, goes beyond these basic necessities to encompass the dignity of people’s lives. Therefore, livelihood promotion is not only to be based on the material needs of people, but also on factors such as equity and rights. This more holistic view is captured in the concept of sustainable livelihood, which goes beyond conventional income- and food-based approaches: “It recognizes the importance of the ability to access resources and entitlements, [and it also] emphasizes that the poor do have assets, options and strategies, and that they are decision-takers” (Seely, 2001, p. 2).

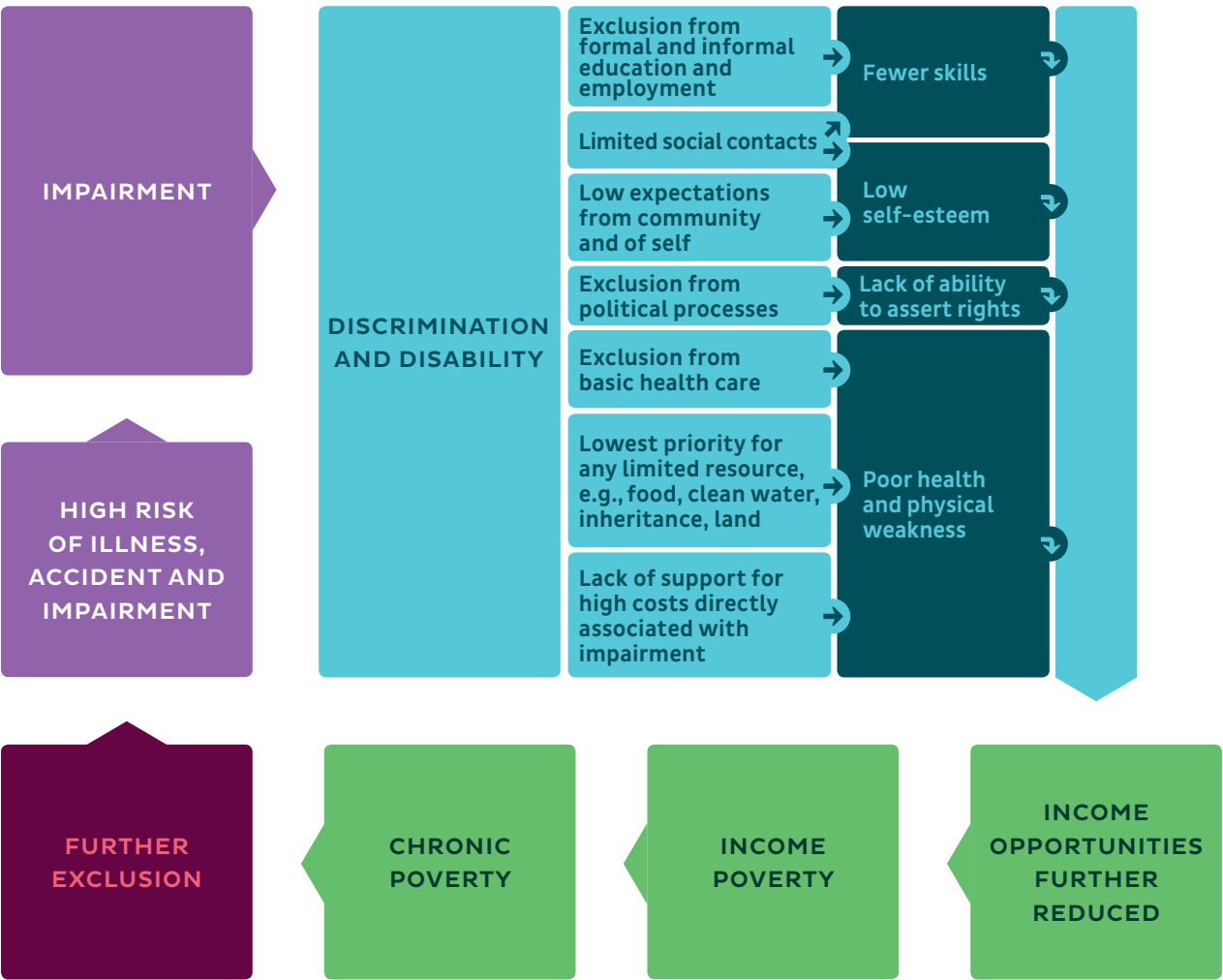
The livelihood approach recognizes that persons with disabilities have capabilities, including for reducing risk and vulnerability, and exercising their voice. Furthermore, within the context of their lives and communities, there are resources and opportunities. It is this lived experience within a community context that plays an important role in determining the quality of life of persons with disabilities:

Poverty and disability need to be understood within the context of a multidimensional or livelihoods approach ... which recognizes that factors related to poverty constrain the ability of individuals living with a disability ... and that disability constrains the ability of a person to more effectively deal with situations of poverty.

Graham et al, 2006

FIGURE 2. DISABILITY, LIVELIHOOD AND POVERTY

THE DISABILITY AND POVERTY CYCLE



Adapted from Yeo and Moore, 2003, p. 572–573.

THE POVERTY AND DISABILITY CYCLE



Much of the sustainable livelihood framework borrows from and develops the capabilities approach to development, which Sen (1999) designed. Rather than focusing on the social, physical and environmental factors that might constrain an individual, the emphasis shifts from inabilities and deficits to assets and capabilities. Research needs to then focus on the physical and non-physical (social, relational) assets that are available to households and how these are, or may be, leveraged to ensure the survival of households in difficult circumstances—in essence, how livelihood strategies can be used to produce livelihood outcomes (Graham, 2000, p. 23). This view of livelihood encompasses aspects of life that would otherwise be discounted in assessments of poverty and disability, such as social isolation.◆

“A FROG IN A WELL”: THE EXCLUSION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES FROM WORK IN CAMBODIA

A Cambodian study by Gartrell (2010) involved the researcher living in a Cambodian village over a nine-month period to gain first-hand insights into the barriers faced by persons with disabilities at the community level. The research focused on the kinds of work that were available to persons with disabilities and how they accessed that work, the “cultural construction of disability” (p. 294) and the spatial limitations imposed by the physical location of the village and the house” (p. 298).

The study focused on the lives of villagers (15 women and 16 men) with a range of mobility and visual disabilities. Multiple interviews were conducted with these individuals over the research period. The study also included a village-wide survey as well as semi-structured, in-depth key informant interviews. A further 58 one-off interviews were conducted with persons with disabilities living around the study

village and in Phnom Penh and 30 interviews with Governmental and non-governmental organizations working in the disability sector were completed.

The research found that persons with disabilities had few economic and physical resources to access employment opportunities outside the village and were trapped by their impairments, dominant social and cultural attitudes and by the physical space itself; confinement to home and a place of low status set in train a vicious cycle of impoverishment (p. 298).

Gartrell concluded that, “Economic, social and symbolic resources are not equally available to all; disabled people are systematically excluded from, and must often fight to attain, the fundamental elements of citizenship: education, employment, equal social membership and well-being” (p. 300).

Employment, disability and livelihood

Employment is central to the well-being of persons with disabilities and therefore was an important part of the action research. The importance of right-to-work opportunities for persons with disabilities was recognized as far back as 1944 in an International Labour Organization (ILO) Employment Recommendation,¹ which stated that persons with disabilities:

“...whatever the origin of disabilities, should be provided with full opportunities for rehabilitation, specialized vocational guidance, training and retraining, and employment on useful work”.

That Recommendation was elevated to a human right in Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights² and reinforced through the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.³ Article 27 of the Convention reaffirms the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others.

However, persons with disabilities face greater obstacles in finding and holding jobs. Some of the main obstacles faced relate to negative attitudes, which appear in the form of discrimination, and the lack of a supportive legal and policy environment. In addition to these broader obstacles, there are others that have a direct impact on persons with disabilities getting to work and performing at the workplace. These include inaccessible public transportation and buildings, a lack of accessible information and a lack of assistive devices and support services (Heron and Murray, 2003). They point to the need for modifications in the workplace (“reasonable accommodation”). As may be required, there could also be a need for making available information in formats and language that can be understood, personal assistance, and appropriate assistive devices. Disability-inclusive business enterprises in the region exemplify efforts that are being made to overcome the obstacles, some with promising outcomes. ESCAP survey results, as well as recent literature, support these observations, although variations exist from country to country.

1 ILO, Employment (Transition from War to Peace) Recommendation, 1944, N° 71.
2 General Assembly resolution 217 A (III).
3 General Assembly resolution 61/106, annex I.

DISABILITY AND DECENT WORK

Only a quarter of the persons participating in the action research indicated that they were not able, or willing, to work. Around 50 per cent were already—formally or informally—employed, whereas another quarter was looking for work. Of all the countries surveyed, Fiji and the Republic of Korea stood out as countries where three-quarters or more of the respondents were not holding jobs. This response was also supported by the outcomes of face-to-face interviews in the countries, which revealed that persons with disabilities received little family and community support to work. Instead, they and their families depended on support from the State and on private assistance.

The terms and conditions of work varied greatly among the eight countries surveyed. For example, in Japan almost 60 per cent were salaried employees, 10 per cent were self-employed and another 10 per cent were unemployed. In contrast, about 60 per cent of the Indian respondents were self-employed, 10 per cent were employees and almost 30 per cent were unemployed (*Table 6*).

TABLE 6. RESPONDENTS' EMPLOYMENT STATUS (PERCENTAGE)

	EMPLOYEE	SELF-EMPLOYED	UNEMPLOYED	NOT LOOKING FOR A JOB
Fiji	4	12	27	56
India	9	61	29	1
Japan	60	10	10	21
Kazakhstan	40	4	33	22
Republic of Korea	7	20	3	70
Pakistan	29	13	32	26
Philippines	25	27	31	17
Thailand	25	49	18	8
AVERAGE	25	24	23	28

The relatively high share of self-employed persons with disabilities in India, and—to a lesser extent—the Philippines and Thailand, does not so much indicate choice, as

necessity. This in turn reflects national employment conditions and opportunities. As is described later, persons with disabilities tend to face a multitude of barriers when seeking employment in the open labour market: poorer skill sets and other consequences of fewer years of formal education and training, and stigmatization.

Finding work is different from finding decent work. ILO has defined the elements of decent work as “fair wages”, “equal remuneration for work of equal value, without distinction of any kind”, “decent living for [everyone] and their families”, “safe and healthy work conditions”, “equal opportunity for everyone to be promoted in his employment to an appropriate higher level”, and “technical and vocational guidance and training programmes”.⁴

Evidence from the action research reveals the severe difficulty that persons with disabilities face in earning a decent income.

With the exception of Japan, more than half of the persons surveyed earned an income that was inadequate for meeting their needs.

In the Philippines, almost half of the households surveyed indicated high levels of income poverty, with an income of 2,500 Philippine pesos (or about 60 United States dollars) per week.

Taking care of other family members, especially dependants, was even more difficult across all countries.

Between 70 and 90 per cent of all persons with disabilities surveyed indicated that they did not earn enough income to support their dependants. In the Philippines, only half were contributing to the family income.

The ESCAP action research indicated that the family income was less when the family had to provide care for a family member with a disability. In India, parents of children with disabilities often needed to reduce working hours, so that they could attend to the needs of their children with disabilities. A Fijian 44-year-old mother of six children, who herself had a physical disability, shared that her husband had not been employed for four years since he was taking care of her. Family, however, can also be an empowering force: not having adequate food for her family motivated that Fijian mother to set up her own small informal sewing business.

Persons with disabilities perceived discrimination, but often lacked the skills and confidence to assert their rights in the workplace. In the face of discrimination, they responded by leaving work, or tolerating employment under less favourable conditions. In Fiji, a mother of two stated: “I have been looking for work, but I feel

4 See General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

that companies do not want to employ me because I am deaf”. Statements of this nature reflect the reality of exclusion as experienced by persons with disabilities themselves.

Workplace harassment of workers with disabilities is common and occurs in many forms. It ranges from violence and abuse by, to derogatory comments from, co-workers and employers, undermining the person’s ability to perform. The survey conducted in India reported that violence and harassment at work, influenced by societal hierarchies and power relations, deterred persons with disabilities from engaging in regular and productive employment. In Thailand, 17 per cent of respondents cited employers’ attitudes against persons with disabilities as barriers to employment.

When engaging in self-employed and home-based informal work, persons with disabilities also face particular barriers.

Social contacts are central to the success of any form of self-employment. Yet, persons with disabilities tend to have fewer opportunities to socialize. The above-mentioned barriers confine many persons with disabilities to the home. Some persons with disabilities engaging in home-based self-employment reported that they had fewer access-to-market opportunities.

Poor access to credit hampers the growth potential of small enterprises run by persons with disabilities. In Fiji, for example, only 19 per cent of survey respondents indicated that they had access to financial services. In Pakistan, only 8 per cent had ever used financial services. Not surprisingly, the data from Fiji and Pakistan reflect a low share of self-employed persons with disabilities (12 and 13 per cent, respectively). Among respondents in India, the share of self-employed persons with disabilities was highest (61 per cent). Since access to microcredit and bank loans with subsidized interest is very uneven, it could reflect the degree of organization and empowerment of persons with disabilities surveyed.

Despite the hardships faced, many persons with disabilities can and do contribute to their families’ incomes. In India, the daily wage received through national schemes made a difference for 75 per cent of the households interviewed. Pro-poor and disability-inclusive government policies and a range of financing options are even more essential in low-resource settings where stable, wage-paying jobs are the exception, rather than the rule.

ACCESSIBILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

In the eight countries covered by the survey, respondents’ views on accessibility (including of public transportation, roads and buildings) varied considerably from country to country, with implications for employment (*Table 7*). In Japan and the

Republic of Korea, the percentages of responses that referred to “not accessible” were relatively low (1 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively). In Thailand, the figure was also relatively low at 5 per cent, the same as that for the Republic of Korea. Some other developing countries had higher percentages of responses that referred to “not accessible” of around 15 to 20 per cent, whereas in India and Pakistan, the percentages were 47 per cent and 39 per cent, respectively.

TABLE 7. ACCESSIBILITY OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, ROADS AND BUILDINGS, ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS (PERCENTAGE)

	ACCESSIBLE	ACCESSIBLE WITH ASSISTANCE	NOT ACCESSIBLE
Fiji	35	45	20
India	25	28	47
Japan	59	40	1
Kazakhstan	53	30	17
Republic of Korea	66	29	5
Pakistan	25	37	39
Philippines	63	25	12
Thailand	58	37	5
AVERAGE	48	34	18

The above-mentioned results need to be qualified by the fact that there were higher percentages of responses for “accessible, with assistance” than just “accessible” in some countries (Fiji and Japan). This could indicate that, in these countries, many persons with disabilities do face obstacles regarding accessibility and overcome these with assistance, including in the form of assistive devices. Culturally appropriate and affordable assistive devices, supported by easy-to-access training and maintenance and repair services, can have an empowering and liberating impact on the lives of persons with disabilities, enabling them to engage in mainstream economic and social activity on an equal basis.

Among respondents in India and Pakistan, as in the Philippines and Thailand, the percentage of those not using assistive devices was significantly higher than those who reported using them. In these countries, as also in Kazakhstan, the vast majority of persons with disabilities depended on family members for assistance. In Japan,

however, the number of persons with disabilities receiving assistance from non-family members was three times that of those receiving it from family members.

Concerning the specific barriers to working, in Fiji “physical status” was cited as the main factor (more than twice as likely to be a barrier). Moreover, persons with physical disabilities cited the substantial costs of travelling to work as an issue. The discrepancy between a possible income and work-related expenses was a contributory factor in their reluctance to work. The lack of quantitative data makes it difficult to ascertain conclusions regarding workplace accessibility. Nevertheless, qualitative data from the survey provide a sense of accessibility issues and employment as experienced by persons with disabilities.

For those with the opportunity to work in the more formal sector, vulnerabilities may be compounded by a lack of accessible facilities and services in the workplace. In Thailand, persons with hearing disabilities expressed concern about the lack of communication devices and sign language interpreters for deaf persons in the workplace. This does not mean that improvements in accessibility should only focus on the workplace. There is a need for seamless connectivity of accessibility from home to all public spaces and to places for learning, training, work, recreation, engagement in community life, and back to the home.

Many attitudinal issues remain. In India, respondents cited the issue of perception of persons with intellectual disabilities as being unable to work outside the home and to recognize related risks and threats. Furthermore, persons with intellectual disabilities were vulnerable to acts of violence by others. In the case of girls and women with disabilities, they were at particular risk of sexual abuse and violence. The Indian survey results suggested that, to address general challenges concerning the employment of persons with disabilities, self-employment might be supported through strengthened skills development.

The research outcomes strongly underscore the need for greater attention to addressing stigma and discrimination, as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Access to financial services and support is an important means of securing a stable livelihood. However, in the Philippines, as in other countries, the majority of persons with disabilities have limited access to such services and support. Another issue is access to information and the scope of dissemination of information on government programmes that reaches persons with disabilities in languages and formats that they can understand. The majority of survey respondents did not receive government financial support and many were not aware of their eligibility for such support. This issue is further addressed below with regard to securing decent employment for persons with disabilities.

Women with disabilities are least likely to be in remunerative employment. Instead, they often provide unpaid labour. When employed, they frequently work under the worst conditions and for less pay. Women with disabilities face multiple forms of discrimination due to their being female, disabled and poor. Sometimes, the problem is compounded by factors such as age or geographic location and additional vulnerabilities associated with ethnicity or other minority status. When discrimination based on one factor or personal attribute is combined with another, they usually reinforce each other and exacerbate the overall impact on the person. Most women with disabilities are likely to have little or no schooling and limited vocational skills, be unemployed and be extremely poor. Exceptions of extreme poverty may be found among women who completed formal education and skills training and established some form of economic security for themselves before acquiring disabilities.

Poverty can be characterized by the lack of resources. This does not mean just money, but also skills, knowledge and social connections. Persons with disabilities in general face difficulties in entering the open labour market. However, men with disabilities are almost twice more likely than women with disabilities to have jobs. For example, in the Republic of Korea, 20.2 per cent of women with disabilities and 43.5 per cent of men with disabilities are employed, as compared with 49.2 and 71.1 per cent for women and men with no disabilities, respectively (Korean Statistical Information Services, 2009). When women with disabilities work, they often experience unequal hiring and promotion standards, unequal access to training and retraining, unequal access to credit and other productive resources, unequal pay for equal work and occupational segregation, and they rarely participate in economic decision-making (O'Reilly, 2003).

Women with disabilities need and want to have the qualifications and skills for decent employment, to be independent and to experience the world outside of their homes.

The ability to work and fulfil social roles is important for human dignity, self-respect and for earning respect from others. Employment for a woman with a disability, as for everyone else, is central to a sense of social integration and psychological well-being rooted in five factors, it: (a) provides an income and the means to be financially independent; (b) improves self-esteem through the individual's greater role in society; (c) accords the individual respect from society which derives from social acceptance of the individual's contribution to the lives of others, as an active citizen in the development process, and a taxpayer, co-worker and friend; (d) provides opportunities for social contacts, to interact with others, and to find identity as part of a wider community; (e) provides opportunities for learning new skills and developing new competencies (based on O'Reilly, 2003). Having a job gives women with disabilities the opportunity to break out of poverty, dependency and social isolation.

Women with disabilities tend to have far fewer opportunities for education, training and employment, as compared with women without disabilities and men with disabilities. Completing even basic education increases the opportunity for women with disabilities to access vocational training for developing skills required by the labour market and could increase their chances of finding jobs and, more likely, better paid jobs.

In certain public places and under certain conditions, women in general are more at risk of experiencing intimidation and danger. The use of public transportation involves the attendant risk of sexual harassment. If they are able to access public transportation, women with disabilities are particularly vulnerable. Transportation was highlighted through the action research as a crucial factor for the employment of women with disabilities. Many families of women and girls with disabilities, believing that it is unsafe for them to go to school or to work on their own, confine them to the home where they feel their protection can be ensured.

SECURING DECENT EMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The ESCAP action research revealed that persons with disabilities were overwhelmingly able and willing to work.

Asserting financial independence is indispensable for dignity and self-esteem. To fulfil this need, persons with disabilities surveyed sought appropriate work, in accessible and safe environments, where their potential was nourished and where they were empowered. However, the physical, societal and economic obstacles that they faced in their environment held them back.

In order to enhance the capacity of persons with disabilities for engaging in employment, attitudinal, policy and legal changes were indicated as essential. This would include action on the physical, socioeconomic and cultural barriers that persons with disabilities faced when trying to find and maintain employment. Any policy to address such issues would need to be based on evidence, such as that regarding accessibility discussed above. Such policy would also need to be informed by the reasons for the considerably lower employment rates among persons with disabilities, as compared with general employment rates.

Reasons for low employment could be: (a) lack of access to personal assistance and/or assistive devices; (b) inadequate public transportation; (c) physically inaccessible work environments; (d) negative attitudes regarding the ability of persons with disabilities to work; (e) policies and legislation related to disability benefits and overall expenses that would be incurred by working, which might discourage persons with disabilities from remaining in the open labour market; (f) ways in which underlying health conditions, especially in a poverty context, could reduce the productivity of persons with disabilities for the types of jobs available in the labour market (adapted from Mitra, Posarac and Vick, 2011).

In the ESCAP action research, clear differences existed between countries, especially with regard to the availability of financial assistance (*Table 8*). Some countries, such as Thailand, extended support to almost all persons surveyed (99 per cent). In the case of Pakistan, however, income support only reached 3 per cent of those surveyed. Such limited provision, combined with poor access to financial markets and formal employment opportunities, increased the financial vulnerability of persons with disabilities.

TABLE 8. GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT RECEIVED BY RESPONDENTS (PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	32	68
India	79	21
Japan	74	26
Kazakhstan	72	28
Republic of Korea	59	41
Pakistan	3	97
Philippines	32	68
Thailand	99	1

In India, the survey showed that most women respondents with disabilities did not have ownership rights over land and experienced discrimination as a serious issue. In that situation, some successful employment initiatives indicated that, with the right policies and political will in place, persons with disabilities, including women with disabilities, could benefit. One reason for success was assessment of the existing gaps in the skills of persons with disabilities and the establishment of committees to identify suitable trades that suited their respective profiles and requirements, as well as those of the market. In addition to disability—specific training for business management, other forms of specific support can be provided—particularly through poverty reduction programmes.

For example, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme now includes specific provisions for disability inclusion.

In Thailand, significant efforts have been made to develop a legislative framework to benefit persons with disabilities, including with regard to the right to work. The 2007 Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act of 2007, and other rules and regulations formulated or revised at the same time, were harmonized and rendered consistent with the principles of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which Thailand ratified on 29 July 2008. The Thai Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act stipulates that both public and private entities are required to employ persons with disabilities under a quota scheme. The employment ratio was initially set at one person with a disability to every 200 regular employees; however, the Thai Cabinet subsequently passed a resolution adopting the new employment ratio of 1:100, to create more gainful employment opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Governments, employers and other civil society stakeholders have an important role in developing appropriate training for persons with disabilities to improve their capacity for working effectively. In Thailand, the survey showed that persons with disabilities often felt that the government vocational training programmes did not quite address their needs and interests. However, those persons with disabilities recognized that the training programmes were helpful in providing an opportunity for developing interpersonal and social skills. This is noteworthy; it is not only formal education that matters, since social skills and “life education” help persons with disabilities gain self-esteem and build their social networks.

In many countries, especially the developing countries, self-employment, including in the informal sector, seems to be the common option for many persons with disabilities who want, or have, to work. In the short term, informal sector jobs may help persons with disabilities meet their immediate livelihood needs. However, in the long term, informal employment compounds insecurity and leaves persons with disabilities even more vulnerable to volatility in market conditions, and other risk factors, including health-related hazards under poor working conditions.

The research indicated the need for the promotion of the decent work agenda for persons with disabilities as a matter of priority. ◆

Education, livelihood and poverty

Poverty is strongly related to the level of educational attainment. Among the respondents, there were high rates of incompleteness of formal education and training required for obtaining qualifications and certification. Of interest, financial limitations were just as likely as disability, or more likely, to be a key factor in the non-completion of education. The research also demonstrated the lack of support for education professionals and institutions, and especially training for teachers and trainers in fostering the learning potential of persons with diverse disabilities. As a result, with limited understanding and skills, teachers, trainers and institutions tended to exclude persons with disabilities from schools and training programmes, or simply ignored their needs.

Table 9 shows significant variations in attendance regarding both regular schools and “schools with additional support” (for students with disabilities). This was also the case regarding “other” schools (that is, non-formal education). In India, almost all respondents stated that they attended regular schools. Concerning attendance at schools with additional support, Kazakhstan and Pakistan stand out, with rates of 40 and 51 per cent, respectively. These rates are significantly higher than those of other countries, while at the same time the respondents in both countries had the lowest rates of attendance in regular schools. Kazakhstan and Pakistan also had very low levels of attendance at “other” schools. In this third school category, the Republic of Korea and Thailand had by far the highest rates of attendance, with 15 and 17 per cent, respectively.

School completion among persons with disabilities is an issue of concern. In this regard, *Table 10* shows the widest variations of all the survey results. This may indicate that persons with disabilities still face numerous challenges in many settings and often do not complete education, with potential repercussions on their capacity to engage in a productive livelihood. The respondents in Kazakhstan had the highest completion rate (85 per cent). In Japan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand, there were also relatively high rates in the range of 70 to 75 per cent. A relatively large number of respondents from these four countries lifted the average rate of school completion for all respondents overall to 61 per cent. An additional consideration, and one which is challenging to evaluate and goes beyond the scope of the research, is that of the quality of schooling received. Related to this issue

TABLE 9. TYPES OF SCHOOL ATTENDED BY RESPONDENTS (PERCENTAGE)

	REGULAR SCHOOL	SCHOOL WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT	OTHER (NON-FORMAL EDUCATION)
Fiji	87	13	1
India	98	2	0
Japan	70	21	9
Kazakhstan	58	40	2
Republic of Korea	84	1	15
Pakistan	46	51	3
Philippines	91	8	1
Thailand	70	12	17
AVERAGE	75	18	6

is whether persons with and persons without disabilities were treated equally in the classroom, and whether persons with disabilities had sufficient resources for attaining a level of education and training that sufficed for a productive livelihood.

For persons with disabilities, vocational training can provide the skills to engage in a productive livelihood that will enable them to break out of poverty. *Table 11* reveals less variation among countries when compared with other indicators related to education, livelihood and poverty. On average, slightly over 60 per cent of persons with disabilities had not participated in vocational training across the countries surveyed. In this regard, the figures were highest in Fiji, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Pakistan, where more than 70 per cent of respondents reported that they had not been involved in vocational training initiatives. Respondents in the Philippines were the only group with a majority reporting participation in vocational training

TABLE 10. RESPONDENTS' SCHOOL COMPLETION STATUS (PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	24	76
India	48	52
Japan	71	29
Kazakhstan	85	15
Republic of Korea	75	25
Pakistan	63	37
Philippines	49	51
Thailand	70	30
AVERAGE	61	39

(53 per cent). In Kazakhstan and Thailand, the rates were relatively closer to parity regarding those who had and had not participated in vocational training.

Aside from vocational training, persons with disabilities can also derive tangible benefits from other forms of training. *Table 12* considers these alternative forms. While the average figure for all countries was similar to that for vocational training, large variations above and below this value were noticeable. Respondents in Kazakhstan and the Philippines provided a higher rate of affirmative responses. They were the only ones whose rates exceeded 50 per cent. Apart from respondents in Japan and the Republic of Korea whose rates were below 20 per cent, respondents in the other countries had rates between 26 and 38 per cent. This points to the need for comprehensive livelihood approaches, as well as for further research on how the training-related challenges faced by persons with disabilities may be overcome. ◆

TABLE 11. RESPONDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING
(PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	22	78
India	40	60
Japan	29	71
Kazakhstan	45	55
Republic of Korea	27	73
Pakistan	22	78
Philippines	53	47
Thailand	47	53
AVERAGE	39	61

TABLE 12. OTHER FORMS OF TRAINING ATTENDED BY RESPONDENTS
(PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	26	74
India	27	73
Japan	18	82
Kazakhstan	55	45
Republic of Korea	12	88
Pakistan	35	65
Philippines	53	47
Thailand	38	62
AVERAGE	36	64

Services, livelihood and poverty

BARRIERS IN ACCESS TO SERVICES

Persons with disabilities face barriers, which restrict their use of a range of services required for daily living. This includes health care. Despite barriers, with the exception of Pakistan and to a lesser extent, the Philippines, the respondents in the other six countries seemed to be visiting a medical professional regularly (*Table 13*).

TABLE 13. REGULAR VISITS BY RESPONDENTS TO MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS (PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	60	40
India	74	26
Japan	77	23
Kazakhstan	68	32
Republic of Korea	76	24
Pakistan	6	94
Philippines	39	61
Thailand	53	47
AVERAGE	57	43

In general, respondents gave mixed reviews of the accessibility and reliability of health clinics available to them. Overall, physical access to the clinics was deemed easier by respondents in the Republic of Korea, Japan and Thailand, and less so by those in Fiji and Pakistan.

Even when health-care facilities were available, the services offered were considered not adequately adapted to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. The ESCAP action research indicated that, in many cases, health-care providers

had not received training to address the needs of persons with disabilities. In some instances, such lack of training became a particular concern: parents of children with intellectual disabilities in the Indian action research reported that sometimes more harm than good was done in the dedicated clinics. Similar experiences were reported in Thailand where, in many instances, medical personnel did not appear to be adequately trained to treat persons with disabilities, both from a medical and a human perspective.

Access to health-care facilities was reported as a challenge in many of the countries surveyed. Poor infrastructure and lack of support and assistive devices made visiting clinics and hospitals challenging. This was so even at the local level and particularly for women with disabilities. Additional concerns included the lack of labelling of medicine in accessible formats for persons with sight impairments, persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with little or no literacy. The non-availability of sign language interpreters in clinics and hospitals was a serious issue for deaf persons.

Public sector programmes were acknowledged as contributing to overall better health for persons with disabilities, despite some limitations in service provision. Some positive interventions related to health care emerged from the private sector in India. A number of companies, such as Gems Park, Hyderabad, were employing persons with disabilities and providing free health-care check-ups in clinics.

Persons with disabilities reported barriers to opening bank accounts and accessing financial services. In the Philippines, for example, only a few respondents had access to banks (21 per cent), even though the majority were urban dwellers. Some persons surveyed reported resorting to more accessible forms of financial intermediaries in their communities. In Thailand, there were cases reported of persons with disabilities having been denied ATM cards and financial loans.

There were indications of not only institutional and attitudinal barriers, but also of legal barriers and frameworks (for example in land and asset ownership). This strongly limited capacities for acquiring and building assets, compounding issues of dependency. The action research indicated that, often in rural settings, conditions for land tenure led to the exclusion of persons with disabilities, since those required an assessment of whether a person could cultivate the land or not.

Access to housing, water supply, sanitation and electricity are fundamental to basic human security. In the Philippines and in Thailand, many persons surveyed owned their domicile and all had access to water and electricity. A lack of such services could contribute to bringing about disability. In India, the problem of high fluoride content in water was reported to be a cause of disability. In many countries, poorly planned and poorly maintained infrastructure (for example, exposed water pipes and open man-holes) further exacerbated the many difficulties that undermined freedom of movement by persons with disabilities.

For persons with disabilities, who may be working from home, basic services become tied to livelihood creation. Access to electricity would enable a person with a disability to operate machinery and equipment. It would also enable a person with a disability to use information and communications technology, for example, computers and mobile phones, to maintain a customer base, access information and undertake education online.

POVERTY OF INFORMATION

Limitations in access to services are compounded by a lack of awareness among persons with disabilities concerning the full range of government support mechanisms. At the same time, there is a need for greater awareness on the part of government concerning the problems faced by persons with disabilities in accessing support mechanisms and services. In Thailand, three areas were identified which also hold true across much of the researched settings (especially in Fiji, Kazakhstan and Pakistan)—persons with disabilities: lacked access to information about services (*Table 14*); faced problems of transportation to access services; and faced discrimination by officials and staff members at various levels. The responses indicated that information regarding available services was rated best in India and in the Philippines. ◆

TABLE 14. ADEQUATE INFORMATION ON GOVERNMENT SUPPORT MECHANISMS, ACCORDING TO RESPONDENTS (PERCENTAGE)

	YES	NO
Fiji	54	46
India	81	19
Japan	74	26
Kazakhstan	56	44
Republic of Korea	68	32
Pakistan	54	46
Philippines	82	18
Thailand	55	45
AVERAGE	65	35

Conclusions:

Building an inclusive future

The ESCAP action research found that persons with disabilities faced a number of challenges in effectively meeting their livelihood needs. Many issues need to be addressed through enhanced understanding, through partnerships and through bold action.

Employment issues were at the core of much of the research findings. Employment offers persons with disabilities a livelihood, but it also addresses stigma and self-worth. It brings persons with disabilities more into the mainstream, with increased opportunities for enhancing capabilities for decision making, including in the financial, political and sociocultural spheres of life. Furthermore, and especially important in developing countries, it can reduce poverty in the household.

Bearing this in mind, policies need to render decent work a more viable option for persons with disabilities, with supportive conditions that allow for work environments that are accessible and free from stigma and discrimination.

The research shows that persons with disabilities do work, and perhaps more so than generally expected by society at large. This implies that there is much to build on in terms of strengthening skills for tapping a wider range of remunerative and satisfying work options. There are, however, clear and specific issues on multiple levels. These need to be understood and addressed in terms of employment, and with regard to the need to work. For example, results from the survey, as well as from other sources show that women with disabilities face particular barriers related to discrimination and norms. Expanding opportunities for women with disabilities is as much to do with raising awareness of their rights and potential, as with improving physical and information accessibility, and strengthening training programmes, legislation and policies.

While employment can help persons with disabilities earn a living, support their families and contribute productively to their communities, educational attainment is critical in terms of providing them with the cognitive and behavioural tools to function in society. Likewise, the significance of vocational education and the opportunity for skill enhancement, including through job coaching, apprenticeship and on-the-job training, cannot be underestimated. Earmarking sufficient resources, for teachers, trainers and personal assistants, and appropriate infrastructure is a prerequisite for enhancing the knowledge and skills of persons with disabilities. When persons with disabilities fulfil their potential and engage in productive livelihoods, they contribute to collective benefits.

Understanding the dynamics between disability and livelihood is highly sensitive to the abilities of the individual persons concerned and their disability type. The survey sheds light on particular disability issues, such as those related to persons with hearing

impairment and those with psychosocial disabilities. The action research showed that this latter group might be less likely to fully benefit from the kind of education that is generally available and obtain gainful employment, given the current state of education, the labour market and prevailing societal views. Changes in these areas are essential. Persons with psychosocial disabilities require greater understanding from society, acceptance by their communities, and care from family members. In this context, further research is needed to provide evidence that can inform more appropriate policies and supportive interventions.

The action research highlighted the considerable barriers to services, especially financial services. Lack of credit, coupled with limited employment opportunities, and higher costs (especially for health care) were formidable challenges to meeting livelihood needs. These challenges compounded problems faced in covering major expenditures, such as for education, transportation and support services. They also constrained the capacity to build assets and savings. As was evidenced in the action research, both physical and social barriers exist that require specific measures to improve the living and working conditions of persons with disabilities.

With regard to enhancing accessibility and participation in livelihood activities, persons with disabilities may require various forms of support and assistance. It is often the case that persons with disabilities, and their families, are not aware of what support they are entitled to. This points to the need for specific efforts and attention to communication and dissemination of available resources and support. For benefits to accrue, support should be tailored to addressing individual and household needs.

To more actively engage persons with disabilities, there is a need to invest in both 'soft' and 'hard' infrastructure, with the development of human and capital resources. In meeting needs, policy action should be cognizant of the realities of the situation of persons with disabilities. It can only be so if this is based on evidence of the needs of persons with disabilities. For this, it is vital that persons with disabilities and their organizations are actively engaged throughout the process of policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Policy should not only build and expand on the resources and opportunities that persons with disabilities have, but also remove the barriers that they face, including stigma and discrimination. The results of the action research go some way in providing an evidence base for such action.

Finally, while the results of the action research clearly indicate the diverse experiences of persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, there was consistent evidence and support for the association of disability with higher levels of poverty and deprivation, and insufficient and vulnerable livelihoods which resulted in and contributed to poverty. The results of the action research underscore the urgency of policy action to address the specific livelihood needs of persons with disabilities, especially those living in poverty. The Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities, 2013–2022, is a fresh opportunity for collective action to remove barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in the everyday life of their communities and nations. ◆

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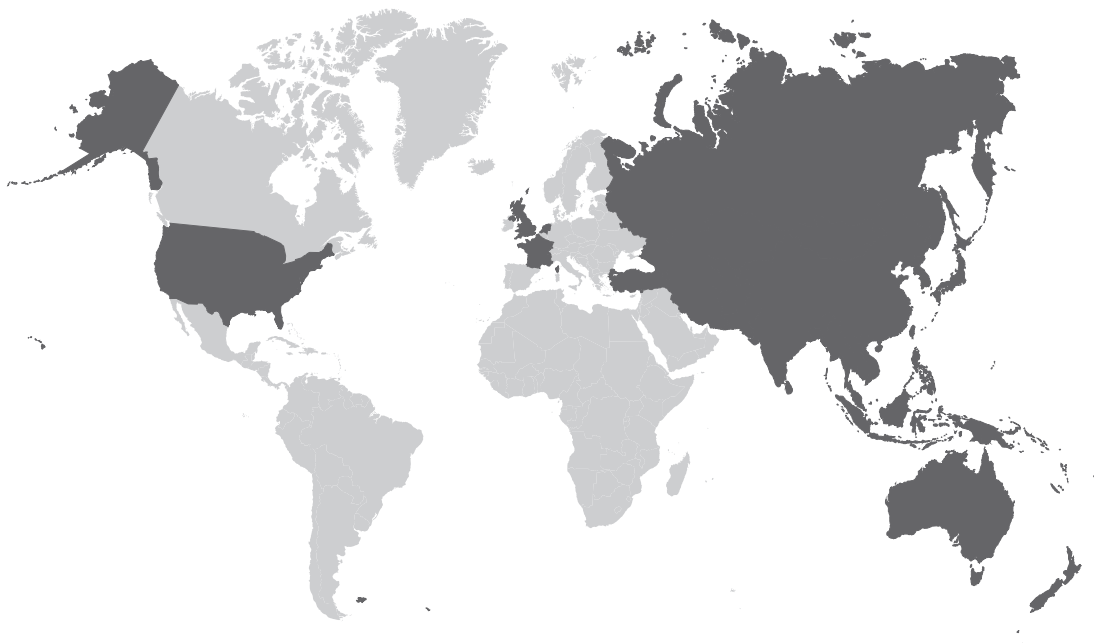
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United Nations Publication
Printed in Thailand
October 2012