

**“Employment & Youth with Disabilities:
Sharing Knowledge and Practices”**

**Report of the
E-discussion on Youth & Disabilities**

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Report of the E-discussion on Youth & Disabilities

Premise

People with disabilities are estimated to comprise 7-10% of the total population, and disability is a major cause of poverty^{1 2} Individuals with disabilities are not only more likely to be poor, but they are subject to prejudice, social isolation and discrimination. Despite the vast numbers involved, little is known about disabled populations.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the development community is changing in this regard and that empirical studies – including many in developing countries – are being launched aimed at providing evidence about the nature, causes and potential interventions regarding disabilities. As a consequence, more consistent and accurate data should emerge in the near future³.

Some countries have well-established laws and policies to promote the full participation of disabled people in the labour force and society at large, including extensive consultation, monitoring, evaluation, and data-gathering mechanisms. However, implementation remains a stumbling block, and people with disabilities continue to be underrepresented in training and employment opportunities⁴.

This situation is unlikely to improve, particularly when labour markets are in constant flux due to rapid globalisation and technological change, unless new approaches are adopted. In light of this, the World Bank Human Development Network and the World Bank Institute organized an e-discussion to explore the challenges of mainstreaming people with disabilities and preparing them for the new global economy.

¹ Elwan A. Poverty and Disability: a survey of the literature, background paper for WDR 2000-2001, 1999.

² Brock K. 1999. A review of participatory work on poverty and ill-being. Consultations with the Poor, prepared for global synthesis workshop, Sept 22-23, 1999. Poverty Group, PREM, Washington D.C.: World Bank.

³ Government Action on Disability Policy. A Global Survey. Part II: Government replies as country profiles, Turkey Independent Living Institute, 2002

⁴ ILO, 2004. Statistics on the employment situation of people with disability: A Compendium of national methodologies. Working paper No 40.

Background

Disabled people are people who, as a consequence of their disability, have reduced capability of activity that causes many difficulties to work, life and studies. The impact of disability on life activities may be different and depends upon the specific context such as the environment (urban, rural) and type of country (developed, less developed) and cultural/societal norms as they related to people with disabilities. .

In 1999, the World Health Organization released a revised version of its International Classification of Functioning and Disability (the Beta-2 version of ICIDH-2), the aim of this Classification is to “provide a unified and standard language and framework for the description of human functioning and disability as important component of health”^[5]. The Classification organizes information according to three dimensions: body level, individual level, and society level and incorporates a number of environmental factors^[6]. The classification was re-launched in 2001 as the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), which serves as the international standard to describe and measure health and disability. Here, the term “functioning” refers to all body functions, activities and participation, while “disability” is similarly an umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions.

The Extent of Disability

The World Bank estimates that disability affects the lives of more than 600 million people globally, the majority living in developing countries^[7]. Inequalities exist, among other, by income-level. Estimates suggest that individuals with disability may account for as many as one in five of the world's poorest, as compared to their estimated 6-7% of total population. One family in every four has an immediate family member with a significant disabling condition⁸. The costs to individuals, families and society are huge. The cost of disability to

⁵ WHO August 20,1999.

⁶ ICIDH-2 complements the International Classification of Disease ICD-10 and now deals with functional states associated with health conditions. ICIDH-2 focuses less than the previous version of ICIDH (International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps. WHO, 1980) on perceived deviations from an ideal human condition and takes account of the environment within which the individual is functioning. It makes reference and links to the UN Standard Rules for Equalisation of Opportunity for People with Disabilities.

⁷ The World Bank.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALPROTECTION/EXTDISABILITY>, accessed on November 3, 2004.

⁸ Elwan A. Poverty and Disability: a survey on the literature, background paper for WDR 2000-2001, 1999.

the global Gross Domestic Product is estimated to be between US \$1.37 and US \$1.94 trillion dollars ⁹.

Youth with Disability

Disability in youth (i.e. 10-24 years old) is a significant problem as it relates to difficulties in entering productive life. According to the first and most recent Disability Statistics Compendium published by the United Nations Statistics Division in 1990, it was estimated that 180 million young people between the ages of 10-24 have a physical, sensory, or mental health disability. Out of that number, 80 percent live in the developing world.

These figures risk growing not only because medical advances will allow disabled infants and children with important disabilities who would not have survived in the past, to grow older, but also because some chronic disabling illness can appear later in life. Young people also are at increased risk due to work-related injuries, including motor vehicle accidents, and risk of violence.

Another important point is that disabled young people are mainly females, especially in the rural area^[10,11].

Causes of Disability

Maternal, perinatal and communicable diseases, old-age, malnutrition, congenital conditions, traffic accidents, work accidents, conflict and landmine victims can cause disability in developing worlds. Different causes of disability in different countries end up with different mixes of disability and impairments that require different types of programs in order to be effective. Some causes of disability can also be prevented, for example, large-scale prevention programs have been enormously successful through effective use of immunization. Yet, while great progress has been made in eradicating poliomyelitis and measles, non-communicable eye diseases, such as glaucoma and cataracts, are insufficiently prevented.

Because of the widespread conflicts worldwide, soldiers, civilians and refugees are vulnerable to potentially disabling diseases and psychological consequences . A recent study in Bosnia

⁹ Metts R. 2000. Disability issues, trends and recommendations for the World Bank. World Bank Social Protection, discussion paper No 0007.

¹⁰ United Nations, 1990 Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, Statistical Office. Disability Statistics Compendium. Statistics on Special Population Groups Series Y, No4, New York: UN

¹¹ Harriss-White B, Subramanian S., 199. Ill fare in India. New Delhi: Sage

shows that more than 30% of analyzed people developed post-traumatic distress ¹² People already disabled are particularly vulnerable to deteriorating health under the precarious conditions caused by war. Health care and social assistance systems break down during conflict, thus health deteriorates, and some conditions - including those not necessarily related to conflict - can become disabling. Preventive programs such as pre-natal and immunization services, as well as curative measures for ill children, are interrupted, hence they are more prone to face disability as they age.

Education of People with Disability

The avenue for disabled people to education opened when society started to realize that they were capable of learning. In the late eighteenth century, schools and institutions for the blind and the deaf emerged in Europe, and the achievements of the people in these schools improved society's perception of the capabilities of disabled people. Institutions and schools for physically disabled, however, emerged much later, i.e. in the 1920s and 1930s ⁹. To date, however, the fact remains that disabled people receive less education and leave school with fewer qualifications than others, and this issue is particularly acute in developing countries. Lack of education is a problem for the majority of disabled young people. Lack of schooling reinforces the belief that such children can not learn; that such children should not be put through the stress of learning. Physical barriers, such as stairs, often make school buildings inaccessible. In addition, lack of trained teachers, and appropriate teaching materials limits access to education for millions of disabled children.

Some gender inequities have been found in education for young people with disability. As Russo¹³ notes, cultural bias against women in general makes many families and educational systems less willing to allocate resources and opportunities to all female students. In contrast, Miles in a study in rural Pakistan found 22% of all disabled children, without any evidence of gender bias, had received some schooling within the general classroom setting and reports similar observations from Sri Lanka¹⁴

¹² Rosner R, Powell S, Butollo W. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder after the siege of Sarajevo. *J Clin Psychol.* 2003;**59**:41–56. doi: 10.1002/jclp.10116

¹³ Russo H. 2003 *Education for All: A Gender and Disability Perspective*. Washington: the World Bank.

¹⁴ Miles M. 1986 *Children with Disability in Ordinary Schools: an Action Study of Non-Designed Educational Integration in Pakistan*. Peshawar: National Council of Social Welfare

There has been growing interest in "inclusive schooling practices" with UNESCO and UNICEF promoting greater integration into the general classroom setting. However, most of these efforts have been directed towards younger children, not towards disabled adolescents. Attention must be paid toward this age-group, since without proper schooling millions of these young people end up on the street, unemployed and often involved in crime, sex work and drugs. In Western Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, there are extensive educational systems for most children with disabilities from early childhood through late adolescence. Some nations integrate these adolescents into general classrooms. Others provide specialized classes and offer training in social and job skills to help in the transition to adulthood.

Employment of People with Disability

The employment rate of persons with disability tends to be considerably lower than that of non-disabled people in any country, regardless of the overall employment rate. In Sweden, for example, where unemployment rates are relatively low, the rate for disabled people was 9 per cent in 1998 compared to 5 per cent of non-disabled people¹⁵. In countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the disabled unemployment rates can be nearly double those of non-disabled persons, and as high as 87 per cent¹⁶.

Youth unemployment has skyrocketed worldwide over the past decade to some 88 million, according to a new study by the International Labour Office (ILO), reaching an all time high with young people aged 15 to 24 now representing nearly half the world's jobless¹⁷. Formal education for most young people ends by mid-adolescence, after which most males and many females are expected to work outside the home. Young people worldwide are at higher risk for unemployment, partial employment or full employment at lower wages than adult workers, and adolescents with disabilities are at even greater risk.

Coming on to the job market with poor education and limited skills, young people with disability have difficulties competing. Physical or intellectual impairments may limit their job options. For most, social prejudice makes employers unwilling to hire them. Rates of unemployment among the general adult disabled population vary from country to country but

¹⁵ O'Reilly, Arthur. 2003. *The Right to Decent Work of Persons with Disabilities*. Geneva: ILO.

¹⁶ ILO. 2003. *Proceeding of the ILO/Japan Technical Consultation on Vocational Training and Employment of People with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific*. 14-16 January 2003. Bangkok: ILO.

¹⁷ International Labour Organization. Press Release ILO/04/36, 11 August 2004.

on average, tend to be at 40-60% higher than for the general non disabled population¹⁸. This is true even in developed countries with well-organized skills training programs to help in the transition from school to work¹⁹. Moreover, even when they enter the work place, adolescents with disabilities often find little room for error. If they do not succeed in an apprenticeship or are fired from their first job, they are labelled unemployable.

The female situation is even more difficult, unemployment among disabled young women is higher than unemployment among comparably educated disabled young men. Even when they have received a good education, they take a longer time to find a position, have less job security and less prospect of advancement with that job²⁰.

Principle International Legal Instruments and Policy Initiatives

Several international acknowledgements of the right of people with disability have been made by various international organizations. The United Nations (UN), the (ILO), the Council of Europe and the European Union (EU), provide legal instruments and policy initiatives concerning the right to work of people with disabilities.

ILO Conventions and Recommendations

The first international instrument containing provisions relating to the vocational rehabilitation of workers with a disability was adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1925 (Recommendation No 22), a few years after the establishment of ILO.

In 1944, the International Labour Conference adopted a comprehensive Recommendation (No 71). The ILO stated that disabled workers, “whatever the origin of their disability, should be provided with full opportunities for rehabilitation, specialized vocational guidance, training and retraining, and employment on useful work”. Even if this Recommendation did not refer to gender differences, it underlined the “complete equality of opportunity” for men and women.

Afterwards there have been several legal products adopted by ILO to facilitate employment of disabled people. In 1946, Convention No 77 and 78 and Recommendation No79 established the corrected medical measurements for vocational guidance and rehabilitation of people with

¹⁸ Elwan A, 1999. Poverty and Disability: A Survey of the Literature. Washington: The World Bank, Social Protection Unit, Human Development Network

¹⁹ Metts R. 1999. Disability Issues, Trends and Recommendations for the World Bank. Washington: World Bank

²⁰ Boylan E. (ed.) 1991. Women and Disability. London:Zed Books

disability. Recommendation No 83 and Convention No 88 were released in 1948, calling for special measures to comply with the needs of workers with disability.

Recommendation No. 99, adopted in 1955, has become one of the most important international instruments in the field of employment for people with disability. It served as the basis for national legislation and practice in relation to vocational guidance, vocational training, and placement of disabled persons.

In 1958, ILO again emphasized its anti-discrimination stance through the adoption of Convention No 111 and Recommendation No 111 concerning Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, which outlined policies of non-discrimination in the equal opportunity and treatment in employment.

Due to the increase of technological changes, in 1965 ILO issued a Resolution concerning techniques used in the rehabilitation and training of disabled persons for new forms of employment. This is followed by ILO Convention No 128 in 1967 which requires provision of rehabilitation services to training a disabled person for resumption of previous activity or the most suitable alternative activity having regard to aptitudes and capacity.

In 1968, with the Resolution of the International Labour Conference concerning disabled workers, ILO confirmed its commitment in progressing policy on vocational rehabilitation and in eliminating all discrimination. ILO Convention No142 in 1975 called on Member States to develop comprehensive policies of vocational guidance and training, linked with public employment services.

Finally, in 1983 ILO adopted its landmark Convention No 159 and the accompanying Recommendation No 168 which set out a number of fundamental principles to underlie vocational rehabilitation and employment policy, and detailed measurements which should be taken to promote equitable employment opportunities.

United Nations Declarations

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, although disability is not mentioned as a protected category. Then, in 1966, UN General Assembly adopted two Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights. The first Covenant contains a number of important provisions relating to work and equal employment opportunity, the second protects against discrimination.

Recognizing the importance of the issue, the United Nations subsequently adopted several initiatives regarding employment for disabled people. In 1971, the UN General assembly proclaimed a Declaration on the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons which underline their right to perform productive work. In 1975, the UN General Assembly proclaimed a Declaration on Rights of Disabled Persons. The Declaration affirmed that people with disability had the same civil and political rights as other people.

UN General Assembly proclaimed 1981 the International Year of Disabled Persons with the theme “full participation on equality”²¹. One year later, The UN General Assembly adopted the World Programme of Action (WPA) concerning Disabled Persons²². The WPA contains three overall aims- prevention, rehabilitation and equalization of opportunity²³

In 1993, the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Person with Disabilities were adopted by UN General Assembly²⁴. The Standard Rules are a set of non-compulsory guidelines; employment is covered by Rule 7, which calls on all States to take various measures to ensure that people with disability have equal opportunities.

In December 2001, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution²⁵ which established an Ad Hoc Committee , open to the participation of all member States and observers to the United Nations, to consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral international convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, based on the holistic approach in the work done in the field of social development.

Council of Europe Recommendations

At the regional level, Europe has also initiated common policies on employment for disabled people. The Council of Europe in 1950 adopted the European Convention on Human Rights. However, this Convention has been criticized because the main discrimination provision does not include disability among the ground on which discrimination is prohibited. In 1986, a Recommendation was adopted “to take appropriate measures to promote fair opportunities for persons with disabilities in the field of employment and vocational training”. In 1992, the Committee of Ministers adopted the Council of Europe Recommendation concerning people with disabilities. This document includes sections on prevention, health education, education,

²¹ UNGA Res. 31/123

²² UNGA Res 37/52 of 3 Dec.1982

²³ UNGA Res.37/53 of 3 Dec.1982

²⁴ Resolution 48/96

²⁵ 56/168

training and vocational guidance, social integration and environment, employment, economic and legal protection, statistics and research.

National Policies Addressing Employment for People with Disability

To increase employment for people with disabilities, governments of many countries have taken various measures, from obligatory to non-obligatory regulations, from facilitation to incentive-type measures for employers, disabled persons as well as their representative organizations. While such policies dated back much earlier in several countries, especially the now industrialized countries, some others have been encouraged or re-emphasized by ILO Convention No. 159 of 1983. The Convention requires Member States, in accordance with national conditions, practice and possibilities, to formulate, implement and periodically review a national policy on vocational rehabilitation and employment of disabled persons. Such policy should: (1) promote employment opportunities for people with disability in the open labour market, (2) be based on the equal opportunity between disabled workers and workers generally, and (3) involve consultation with representative organizations of employers and workers, as well as those of and for disabled persons. As of October 2004, 76 countries have ratified the Convention.

As many as 40 out of 189 UN Member States have enacted national **anti-discrimination legislation** in the year 2000, which protects the rights of people with disability for equal employment opportunity¹⁵. Anti-discrimination legislation assumes that specific measures are needed to promote the employment of disabled people, since they are able to compete for jobs provided the environment in which they do so does not discriminate against them because of their disability. The enactment of such law, however, does not necessarily erase the gap of employment rates between people with disability and those without.

Clearly, besides laws, operational measures are needed to create greater employment opportunities for disabled persons. **Quota systems** are an example of measures that have been taken by several countries in order to ensure that a number of jobs are available for people with disability. Such systems call for employers to employ a minimum percentage of disabled workers; they have long been implemented by many European countries and recently introduced in several Asia Pacific and African countries.

There are three types of quota systems: (i) legislative recommendation with no sanction, (ii) legislative obligation without effective sanction, and (iii) legislative obligations with sanction. The latter has attracted most interest from countries which have sought to introduce or modify a quota system in the 1980s and 90s ¹⁵An example of this system is found in Germany, where all public and private employers with at least 16 employees are obliged to provide employment for disabled persons as many as 6 per cent of total employees. Fines are imposed if the quota is not met, and the funds collected are used to promote rehabilitation and employment of severely disabled persons. However, a recent study for the European Community, which looked at employment policies for disabled persons in 18 industrialized countries, found no examples where quota systems achieved their targets. An explanation to this phenomenon might be the one that is suggested by Waddington ²⁶(1996), as referred to by O'Reilly ¹⁵, that quota systems are based on the idea that the protected group of workers are less capable than other workers; hence employers will try to evade their obligations to employ such workers.

To encourage employers to hire people with disability, governments have taken **persuasion measures** in the forms of information and awareness raising campaigns, awards, codes of good practice, etc. Although useful, these measures are no substitute for legislation and other obligatory measures in promoting equal opportunity and treatment for workers with disabilities.

Governments have also intervened by providing services and supports to disabled persons to facilitate them in finding and retaining jobs. Workers with disabilities tend to fall behind other job seekers, particularly when unemployment rates increase. Often this is due to their inability to compete on the basis of technical skills or qualifications. This is why **training for employment** for people with disability is essential. Vocational training, directed to identifying and developing human capabilities for a productive and satisfying working life, can be delivered in various institutions and methods such as schools and technical colleges, vocational training centres, distance learning, etc. It may also take the forms of formal apprenticeships and on-the-job training. The trend is now to shift from segregated system to mainstream vocational training. The Australian programme Bridging Pathways is one

²⁶ Waddington Lisa, Reassessing The Employment of People with Disabilities in Europe: from Quota to Antidiscrimination Laws. Comparative Labour Law Journal, 18,62,1996, pp62-101

example of a national initiative to bring people with disabilities into mainstream training programs by retraining staff, appointing disability coordination officers and conducting research. In Chinese province of Heilongjiang, thousands of people with disabilities have been trained with skills in agriculture through the Green Certificate Training Programme, where most trainees start business after completing the training²⁷..

Other reasons why participation rates among people with disability are lower compared to other workers are lack of information on work opportunities and reluctance to register as having a disability. **Employment-related services** have been provided by governments in many countries, including vocational guidance, placement service, information on training and employment opportunities, job search training which encompasses preparation of resumes, interview techniques, presentation skills, etc. Japan, for example, assigns an employment promotion guidance officer to guide and assist in job placement of disabled job seekers at all public employment offices. Hong Kong applies a selective placement service, which assesses and counsels job candidates and provides placement assistance and three-month follow-up services. The placement service also encourages co-worker mentoring, awareness training and technical assistance for employers¹⁶.

Provision of **financial supports** is another measure taken by governments to encourage employment for workers with disabilities. One of the most common types of such supports to employers is wage subsidies to cover a shortfall in productivity. In Austria, for example, subsidies are provided up to 80 per cent of the full wage in the first year of employment. Other types of financial supports include grants towards training costs, grants for tutorial assistance, tax credits in respect of each new disabled worker, etc. Grants may also be available to disabled persons who wish to set up their own business or to establish a cooperative. In Italy, social cooperatives with a workforce of which at least 30 per cent are persons with disabilities may be exempted from social insurance contributions. Financial assistance may also be available to third-party agencies to assist disabled persons in preparing and training for employment. In the United States, grants may be available to States to establish programmes of technology-related training, access and assistance, and awards can be made to private agencies which deliver assistive technology training and services at local

²⁷ Perry, Debra A. (ed). 2003. *Moving Forward: Toward decent work for people with disabilities – Examples of good practices in vocational training and employment from Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok: ILO.

level ¹⁵. Supports may also be given in non-financial forms, thus rather as **technical and personal supports**, such as assistance in arranging for a special driving licence, technical aid and devices, personal assistance to assist in relation to personal hygiene or transport, provision of readers for workers with visual impairment and signers/sign language interpreters during interviews or in the workplace, etc. In Denmark, for example, personal assistants can be hired to assist disabled persons in occupational tasks ²⁸..

In November 2001, ILO adopted the Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace. It was intended to guide employers to adopt a strategy in managing disability-related issues in the workplace. Although is primarily addressed to employers, the document notes that “governments play an essential role in creating a supportive legislative and social policy framework and providing incentives to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Moreover, the participation and initiative of people with disabilities is important for the Code to be achievable”. Conceptually, **disability management** is a means that facilitates recruitment, advancement, job retention and return to work of persons with disabilities. At the operational level, this is often a process that is integrated into human resource development practices promoting entry and advancement of disabled workers as well as prevention, rehabilitation and safe-return-to-work interventions to address workplace injury and disability.

A key to success of any kind of policy measure is its acceptance by the target groups. A **consultation mechanism**, enabling representative organizations of employers and workers as well as those of and for disabled persons to be consulted on the implementation of national policy on vocational rehabilitation and employment should therefore be established. This is also directed by the ILO Convention No. 159 and Recommendation No. 168, which state that these organizations should be able to contribute to the formulation of policies on the organization and development of vocational rehabilitation services, and makes a number of recommendations about the form their participation might take. Such consultations have been seen in place in many countries. In Austria, Czech Republic, France, Mauritius, Sweden and UK, for example, permanent councils or committees have been set up involving organizations of and for disabled persons and are consulted on the implementation of national policy. In other countries such as Chile, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, the Philippines and Tunisia, all

²⁸ OECD, 2003. *Policy Brief: Disability Programmes in Need of Reform*. March 2003.

three representative groups are responsible on various bodies for drafting or implementing policies and programmes ¹⁵.

Another very important element in policy implementation is monitoring and evaluation. For this, an information system should ideally be in place, to provide baseline as well as subsequent information on the employment of people with disabilities. Unfortunately, difficulties exist not only at the tier of generating information on a regular basis for monitoring and evaluation purposes, but more profoundly even at the primary stage of establishing baseline information, among other due to the inconsistency of the definition of “people with disability”. There are wide divergences in how disability is defined, not only between countries, but also between Ministries and programmes within countries. With a few notable exceptions (USA, Canada, UK, Australia and Sweden), the data required for policy and programme development, planning, monitoring and evaluation at country level are inadequate. ILO ¹⁶ also acknowledges this problem as prevalent in Asia Pacific region.

O’Reilly¹⁵ also mentions that the general need for better data is being reinforced by growing and competing demands on public expenditure. Competition for resources exists not only within the overall context of national economic policies, but also between disability policies (prevention versus rehabilitation versus equal opportunity, for example) and within the disability employment area itself. For instance, should available resources be allocated to train all those who have a disability, concentrated in skill training for those most likely to get jobs, or devoted to those most in needs?

According to OECD ²⁸ the average per capita cost for vocational rehabilitation and training is low compared to the average cost of disability benefits. Given that such programmes help secure permanent employment, the investment should quickly pay for itself. Thus it is more beneficial for countries to give priorities to the provision of vocational rehabilitation and training, as well as other measures to promote employment for people with disabilities, over generous disability benefit schemes that are often found to discourage employment. The results of their study suggest that disability benefit systems and their rules strongly influence the number of people in disability benefits; it matters, especially, how generous the disability

benefits are. On the other side of the coin, sadly, the outflow from disability programmes to a job is virtually nil in all of the OECD countries.

Numerous countries still perceive the issue of disability in population from the welfare approach, rather than as a human right issue which calls for, among other, equal employment opportunity. ILO study in 14 countries in Asia-Pacific region, for example, indicates this by showing that in more than half of the studied countries the responsibility for disability issues fall under the ministries of social welfare, which may include other issues such as health, but not labour, as compared to the rest of the countries ¹⁶.

It is of course not the intention of this summary to suggest abandoning altogether the disability benefit schemes, as there are people who are desperately in need of financial support and are not able to work. However, more efforts should be directed toward facilitating disabled persons to find and retain decent jobs. At the same time, mutual obligations should be introduced. If a society makes a sincere effort to help disabled persons participate in employment, it is only fair that disabled persons are expected to take advantage of the opportunities, by making the appropriate effort to enter the labour market.

The ILO study in the Asia-Pacific region also demonstrates the lack of implementation of the growing bulk of legislation. Thirteen of the countries have some kind of disability legislation in place; the fourteenth, Cambodia, has a draft law (as of January 2003). Mechanisms for implementation of legislation, including disability councils, strategic plans and partnerships are unlikely to be in place. And, even when such structures are in place, their effectiveness is questionable. The system weakens further when practices and services are examined. Therefore, the outcomes are not sufficient to allow people with disabilities to compete in the very competitive labour market that is facing employees in the region. It is likely that this problem also occurs in other regions of the world.

OECD ²⁸ found a close relationship between employment rates of disabled people and those of non-disabled people, which suggests, first, that general labour market forces have a strong impact on the employment of people with disabilities, and, second, that general employment-promoting policies also foster the employment of special groups in the labour force. In the abundance of labour supply, employers tend not to reach out to new groups of employees, especially where additional costs such as insurance, transportation and infrastructure would be

involved. Creation of jobs, inevitably, should become the main priority of governments facing such situation.

To sum up, governments have taken and should continue to take the leading responsibility in dealing with the issue of disabilities. Full participation of and equality for disabled persons in the workplace should be fostered through a variety of measures, some of which have been described above, along with the introduction of general employment-promoting policies. It is of ultimate importance to create an environment which enables communication and cooperation among the different actors involved, i.e. government as policy makers, employers, workers in general, and disabled persons, to ensure that any policy measure is well-balanced and therefore, could be well-implemented.

Overview of the e-discussion

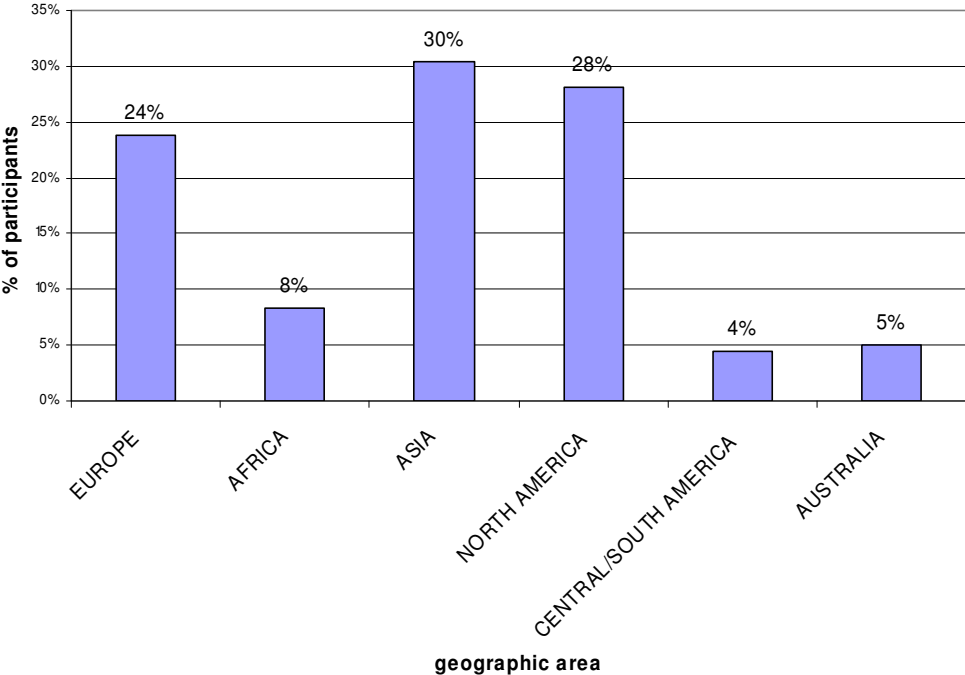
The e-discussion lasted four weeks. A specific theme was assigned each week, moderated by one of the partners collaborating on the study. The first week was focused on the supply side (disabled youth looking for a job) and was moderated by Bocconi University, Italy. The second week centred on the demand side (employers offering jobs to disabled youth) and was moderated by the Employer's Forum on Disability, UK. The third week tackled the roles and responsibilities of “other actors” (parents/families, schools, training centres, and others), and was moderated by Workability International, USA. The last week concentrated on the role of policymakers (national and local governments) and was moderated by Cornell University, USA.

The World Bank sent electronic invitations to the e-discussion by activating a dataset of more than 3900 contacts worldwide, including various disability-related networks of academics, NGOs, Disabled People Organizations (DPOs) and the Employers Forum.

Of the 423 people who registered to participate in the e-discussion, 184 actively contributed for a total of 525 messages. The majority of participants came from Asia (30%), North America (28%) and Europe (24%). The remaining 17% were comprised of individuals from Africa (8%), Australia (5%) and Central/South America (4%). Participants provided information about themselves during enrolment that allowed them to be classified as belonging to one of four categories: disabled people; disabled consultants; intermediaries, and non-disabled consultants. Disabled people constituted 14% of active participants; they discussed how their disabilities have influenced their educational and professional choices and offered solutions to some of the obstacles faced by the disabled. The second group, which made up 17% of the total, consisted of disabled people working as consultants in organizations that strive to improve the social and professional living conditions of disabled people (e.g. public institutions, academic centres, supranational institutions, NGOs, etc.). The third group was the largest (45%) and included representatives from a wide variety of organizations (e.g. public, private, non-profit) working to bridge the gap between the supply and demand sides of the labour market. The last group (24%) was composed of non-disabled consultants, such as academics or private researchers, who are contracted by intermediaries.

In the following sections the main issues discussed in each single week have been reported. We avoided to provide the reader with a concise summary because – even though in some cases issues do overlap across the four weeks – we think that it is interesting to present a global picture of the single topics as it came from the e-discussion participants.

Figure 1. Participants to the e-discussion by geographic area



Findings

The aim of the **first week** was that of gathering information and opinions as to how the “supply” side of the labour market, or “disabled youths looking for a job”, appears to be across the world whether in the formal or informal market.

Major discussion was around the themes of Society’s perspective, Education system and Governmental policies.

Society’s perspective

It emerged that the greatest impediment to the lives of young people with disabilities is prejudice social isolation and discrimination.

Basman from South Africa says that “*..Society negative social stereotyping led to the historical and current discrimination of people with disabilities and their alienation from the rest of the society. Disability discrimination can therefore be seen as a cross-racial and cross cultural problem affecting all societies, and one that no racial or cultural group can claim to have fully come to terms with*” which seems to be a common perception in other countries as well. Jyoti (India) also says that “*We disabled people see our problems as coming mainly from people's attitudes, the environment and social systems that actually keep us fairly oppressed. People are being educated in the thinking that we disabled people must be receivers; not that we must integrate them into our society and give them a job.*”, This happens to be the case in western countries as well as testified by other participants.

Stigma and prejudice come from the part of the employers, schools, society as a whole, and often from the family itself. At this regard, Ayub Nabi Molla (Bangladesh) tells a story which is self explanatory “*..before 1996 I was a project director of an international organization. I have lost my right hand by a road traffic accident. The Organization's authority considered me a invalid one and retrenched from my job without giving justified compensation. I had become unemployed... I became hopeless. One of my relative advised me to beg from train to train*”.

As Deon (UK) says “*perceptions held by "normal" people about the abilities, physical and mental, of disabled people is to a large extent pre-determined by beliefs inculcated in them during their formative years. Such beliefs arise in the cultural and religious environment they grow up in. This impacts directly on potential employment opportunities for disabled people but also impacts on disabled people's self image. Governments can legislate to create an*

environment of equal opportunity but the problem of changing perceptions and avoiding misconceptions about lack of ability amongst the disabled ought to be tackled by religious/cultural groups and implanted in youngsters.”

Because of this misperception of disability, disabled youth tend to be seen as unable to bring any contribution to society. Employers tend to assume that a person with a disability would not be able to handle competitive employment and that the problems they would encounter by hiring disabled people would end up with higher costs for the company.

The education system

Education is a major concern for most disabled young people in developing countries. This becomes even more important considering how much fast the technology is gaining importance in almost all types of job.

Penny (UK) addresses this issue when she talks about the emerging of new styles of employment *“Within the UK we see a move from manufacturing in some areas towards service provision. Often this new type of employment is very reliant on IT and new technology. There is a risk that such types of employment increasingly excludes disabled people when the capacity for adjustments to soft/hardware, employment procedures etc are not included at the design stage”*. Slightly different is the issue tackled by Eric (Australia) who says that *“University graduates with disabilities are more likely to begin their career search with a lack of relevant work skills and experience compared to their non-disabled peers because of a lack of access to pre-graduate employment. It may also be caused by the extra time some students with disabilities are required to spend in meeting the demands of their academic and social commitments, such as organising personal carers, finding and using accessible public transport, acquiring accessible study texts, finding and using accessible technology, etc”*.

As to education, the situation is rather diverse in the countries and can mainly be referred as to: (i) the lack of dedicated schools, and to (ii) the incapacity of the education system to implement programs specifically aimed at advising students as to their best fit opportunity first when enter and secondly when graduate from the college/university.

The first case is the easiest to comment upon and also the more difficult to address since it is all about devoting more resources to increase the number of facilities appropriately designed for disabled people or to adjust the current system for meeting the disabled people' needs. Nevertheless, in countries where the scarcity of resources is the major issue, even the easiest

solution becomes quite a challenge. The second case is more complex to address, even though it is that with more manageable solutions. First of all, let us defining what is meant by incapacity of the education system to implement programs specifically aimed at advising students as to their best fit opportunity first when enter and secondly when graduate from the college/university. This may refer to the lack of mentoring and university orientation programs, supportive environment, and transition plans from learning to work, i.e., internship programs and career service. *“Mentoring is a simple concept not requiring work place modifications and is a great tool for demystifying disability and giving people who have a disability a potentially vital network opportunity that can lead to opportunities beyond the mentoring program”* (Kevin, Australia). The same is true for the more general university orientation programs that apply in almost all universities and in some cases also colleges across the world. The question here is that of including and planning orientation programs that specifically take into consideration the condition of disability by advising disabled students as to the best fit options available in the school. The feasibility of such programs is rather intuitive given that the marginal costs would not be relevant if not even null.

As to the second aspect, this has been clearly highlighted by Jennison (Canada) who says *“In the college and university setting, students with disabilities have told us about experiences with less than cooperative departments or professors who feel students with particular disabilities either should not, or can not successfully complete programs and courses. Comments such as "How can a blind person be an engineer", "You are Dyslexic, you can't teach," and "Deaf people can't be nurses", are a few that I remember off-hand students mentioning to us.... Some students unfortunately decide, for what ever reason that the added pressures brought on by this less than supportive environment are too much to handle. Some decide to change their field of study, while others simply drop out of school altogether. This most certainly will impact on these students as they consider entering the labor market. Some, for example, decide that they will not disclose their disabilities based on the challenging times they faced in school. Others end up believing what they have heard and choose not to pursue a particular career”*.

Internship programs may prove to be among the most effective ways to empower youth disabled people while looking for a job and again, it does not need to be set up specifically for disabled people but can be part of the current internship programs usually ran by colleges and universities. *“Recognizing that it is often difficult for people with disabilities to get that first*

job, one of the goals of the internship program is to sort of level the playing field by giving students actual work experience, something meaningful that they can put on their resumes” (Meredith, USA).

The governmental policies

As to the governmental policies, it must be said that it mainly relates to the demand side and will therefore be discussed in the following sections. Nevertheless, some of the participants have pointed out some interesting elements that can support disabled youth while looking for a job. Governmental policies mainly concern the wide spectrum of national regulations aimed at integrating the disabled people in the labor market. The “quota system”, fiscal incentives for private companies hiring disabled people, economic incentives for employers who decide to buy special appliances for disabled people (e.g. braille and hearing aids for blind and deaf people) are examples of governmental policies that try to attain a sufficient level of social protection. The supply side of this issue, which is undoubtedly related with the demand side, has been clarified by Helga (Netherlands) when she says that *“The disabled person should know about the procedures how to get the adaptations and subsidies and things like that, as you cannot expect the employer knows those things”*. Providing employers with clear and precise information on how to get special appliances and what the economic incentives currently are for buying them surely is invaluable information for the employer therefore helping the job-searching process.

The last major problem is in the infrastructural system (such as roads, transportation..) that, especially in developing countries, represents a very much big barrier for disabled people, impairing them to reach almost any place outside their home. Mary (Kenya) says for instance that *“infrastructure in Kenya is not meant to cater for disabled people. Our roads do not have special side lanes which disabled people can use and those who decide to brave their way to town have to battle it out with the cars. That could be really terrifying! Our public transport vehicles also are not tailored to meet the specific needs of disabled people. Most of our institutions are not built to cater for the needs of disabled youth and the challenge of trying to fit in is enormous e.g trying to access a building with no ramp with a wheelchair. Most of our lifts are meant for people who can see and hear thus a disabled person would need assistance otherwise they may not make it to their destination”*. Unfortunately this does not happen in developing countries only and is obviously at the base of any further discussion on how to empower the youth disabled.

The **second week** was about the role of the employers in the employment of young disabled people. Much debate was around the society's perspective, the role of intermediaries, and government role.

Society's perspective

The discussion focused on what disability actually is and on the confusion which can be caused by the disability symbol of wheelchair, when in fact only a small proportion of disabled people use a wheelchair (5 – 8%). This leads to a more general problem i.e. in the general public disability is often equated with severe handicaps that require substantial aids (e.g. wheelchair) and workplace adjustments. Severe disabilities, however, affect only about one third of the working-age disabled people. Many disabilities have arisen while at work and come from cardiovascular diseases as well as mental and psychological problems ²⁸. Employers often recognise they are not fully aware of what disability may mean and while there are some who do not even show any interest in improving the knowledge at that regard, there are others who are genuinely willing to understand for purpose of hiring disabled workers.

The role of intermediaries

It is well known that the employment rate of people with disabilities is low, in some countries very low. This can be seen as a failure of government social policies but also as inefficiencies of the market to make the supply meeting the demand and vice versa. The work done in Canada showed that many conventional job search tools and techniques do not work for disabled people. The same often happens with employers who – even though willing to hire disabled people – do not know how to reach them. Intermediaries therefore play a crucial role in helping disabled people and employers communicate and in training/ matching disabled people's skills to jobs. This clearly emerged from the second week discussion. However they are not always the solution to the problem. As Rhiannon says "*The competency of these intermediaries is key: too often they lack the understanding and skills to actually make a difference. Disabled people themselves as well as employers must be actively involved in designing programmes and initiatives which are effective. Effective intermediaries are those which serve the needs of both disabled people and employers – experience shows that services which work for business, usually work for disabled people too*". The analysis of the role of

intermediaries can however be found further on in this report since it has been the main topic of the third week of the e-discussion.

Governmental policies

a) Accommodation

By and large, the majority of disabled workers need some sort of accommodation at the workplace in order to perform the job. There was discussion around this issue and, more specifically, concerning the (i) employers' perspective that it is a costly measure, (ii) the unawareness of existing government's incentives/assistance and the active role that disabled people and intermediaries should adopt to help employers make useful adjustments. From available data ²⁹ it emerges that annual workplace accommodation costs are under USD 1,500.00 which can be considered a reasonable amount especially considering that in the majority of the countries there is some form of assistance from the governments to pay for (or co-pay) the workplace adjustments. It can obviously not be the case in those low-income countries where there are no governments' aids. From the discussion comes out that there is a general agreement with the importance of accommodation but that you can't expect employers to be experts. Here the third aspect of this issue. Disabled people and intermediaries should work with employers to help them make useful adjustments and find what the current government's assistance program is. Pranav (India) says "*When I started working 2 years ago my employer's web site and other internal IT systems were not accessible. This was hindering me effectively doing my work. I met with the in house development team and now have got most of the systems to be fully accessible. Of course, there were a lot of factors that facilitated this chief among them being my employer's ability to be open minded and the developers' willingness to listen.*" Also Penny (UK) says "*While many employers may be aware of their legal duties, they may not be aware of the assistance that is available to them... here in the UK we have a Government funded scheme that helps pay most of the costs of adjustments or accommodations - but this is little understood. Employers tend to equate disability with extra expense but, in fact, most adjustments or accommodations can be achieved at little or no cost. Simply re-thinking how a job can be done or re-allocating tasks amongst the work force can be hugely effective*".

²⁹ Canadian Abilities Foundation, 2004

b) Quota systems

As stated in the background to this report, quota systems are an example of measures that have been taken by several countries to cope with the problem of unemployment of people with disability. Such systems call for employers to employ a minimum percentage of disabled workers and ultimately aim promoting employment opportunities in the mainstream. They have long been implemented by many Western countries and recently introduced in several Asia Pacific and African countries. The quota system is also the most criticised government policy since it does not seem to have attained its goals in almost any of the countries where it is applied. During the e-discussion a fair amount of discussion arose around this issue and while there was someone who advocated the quota system, there were others who accused the system to be entirely ineffective.

Mary (Kenya) says *“I think your country is way ahead of Kenya where there are no quotas or any sort of positive discrimination to enable disabled people make their way to institutions of higher learning, government jobs or medical care in government hospitals. I agree with you that the quota of 1% is a good place to start. Meanwhile, I can only hope and wait for the day there will be any sort of positive discrimination for people with disabilities in Kenya”*.

A different perception is that of Nafees (Bangladesh) who clearly indicates all the major problems with the quota system *“In Bangladesh, over the last few decades there has been a 10% employment quota reserved for orphans and persons with disabilities – in all public sector jobs. However, this quota had a number of problems. Firstly, the quota did not apply in the case of first and second class jobs in the government machinery and so only other lower quality jobs were on offer. This probably was an indication that the employers would think that people with disabilities were not ‘adequately fit’ for higher-ranking positions. Secondly, there was no demarcation of how much of this quota was further allocated for orphans and persons with disabilities. So an employer could take up all orphans and fill up the quota.....Fourthly, this quota was declared simply as an administrative order, without any strong legal backing. So no employer was bound to follow this, and nobody could be challenged for not abiding by the order. Finally, while the quota was there,... the Ministry of Establishment, ..., had set forth a number of criteria, which also include health related indicators, and so persons with disabilities are barred from the recruitment on health related grounds. ... More recently, in a public meeting, the Prime Minister has declared a fresh 1% quota, this time specifically for persons with disabilities, in all cadre service jobs in the*

country. We are hopeful that, with this new quota being enforced, and with the legislation being amended, soon the employment market in Bangladesh could open new horizons for persons with disabilities”.

A similar issue that raised some discussion was that of wage subsidies. There are countries where the wage of the disabled people is shared between the employer and the government at least in the short run. Again, it has been said that this measure is rather ineffective because in the long run employers tend to leave disabled employees. However there also are positive effects as outlined by Nayinda (Norway) *“Wage subsidies might have a negative side but they also have certain advantages. At least, the short-term employment provides the individual with a disability with work experience which as you know, is often the requirement for applying for jobs on the open job-market. Secondly it provides exposure to the PWD while it also creates opportunities for the employer and other employees at the workplace to interact with a disabled person and maybe, acquire positive experiences from that”.*

The problem with quotas and social protection policies more in general, is that even though they generally aim at introducing disabled people in the mainstream, often do that by instilling the perception that disabled employees have had jobs because of their disability and not because they can effectively contribute to the production process. Nonetheless, some form of legal protection is necessary to promote employment among disabled people, especially if young. As suggested by Rhiannon, discrimination legislation, which protects the right of disabled people to compete on a level playing field so that they can demonstrate their skills, is likely to be more effective and can be thought as a valid alternative.

The **third week** of the e-discussion tackled the roles and responsibilities of intermediaries. Again the discussion was around the issues of society’s perspective, education and government’s policies.

The Society’s perspective

The participants envisaged that the intermediaries have to play a role in providing the necessary support to people with disabilities, taking into consideration that disability is a social issue, is not a personal problem, and is not only an employment problem.

People with disabilities are more able to find solutions to their challenges and must have direct control over resources made available for these purposes. Sebastian Ferrer and Philip Day from Sweden write: *“We have the feeling that, despite of the quality and good intentions of programs involving intermediaries promoting employment, and training for youth with*

disabilities, these programs might not have the desired effect. We suspect that funding non-disabled intermediaries who attempt to help PWDs become more employable does more good for the intermediaries than it does for the PWDs and may do little to change the negative view of PWDs held by society. Ideally funding should go directly to PWD or organizations of PWD". Mary Kemunto (Kenya) reinforces by saying "Your suggestion that people with disabilities be funded directly for their program caught my attention for two reasons: First I think that only people with disabilities know what their most serious problems as well as their most urgent needs. When people without disabilities are charged with the task of coming up with programs for PWD, they can only imagine what is needed and sometimes their imagination could be wrong..... I therefore agree with you both and suggest that PWD should be empowered and given the challenge of taking charge of their affairs and if they so wish, they can work in partnership with people without disabilities. That would definitely be more effective. Secondly, I think that programs would be more attractive to PWD if they are organized by other PWDs. I think they (PWD) are more likely to give their whole hearted co-operation to such programs. That is not to say however that people without disabilities should not take charge where there is need as they prepare a PWD to take over".

What does funding directly disabled youth mean? Sebastian and Philip say: "Promote the organizations of customers (i.e. youth with disabilities) at national and international levels, and support them financially and in other ways in order to empower them and lift the status of PWD. The support to organizations of PWD is especially important in developing countries where these organizations are often non-existent or very weak. Promote the creation/development of good, effective and compulsory legislation against discrimination in every country. Support the work of the UN Convention on rights for PWD. We feel that workplace adjustments should be publicly funded and that efforts should be made to inform PWD about such funding and how to get it. Simple clear procedures are required along with simple clear definitions of who qualifies. Discrimination must be banned and employers have the responsibility of making workplaces accessible. Develop, in collaboration with organizations of youth with disabilities, accessible, easy to get information about the different programs and how to participate in them. The organizations of PWD should administrate or participate in the administration of the programs."

The solutions envisaged here can - on one hand - increase the well-being, self-esteem and income of people with disabilities and - on the other hand - raise public awareness on disability issues, gradually changing the attitude of society towards disabled people.

Schachter (USA) argues that *“Despite the huge number of intermediaries in the U.S., the majority of PWD's, both youth and adults, remain unemployed. The idea of releasing funding directly to the individual is interesting. The Ticket-to-Work initiative directed by the Social Security Administration, is basically an initiative to give vouchers (cash equivalents) to people with disabilities who receive Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income (SSDI, SSI) so that they can purchase the training and employment services that they want from an approved list of vendors.. .”* Jimmy Weber explains the Ticket to Work initiative *“A PWD "assigns" their Ticket to an approved "Employment Network" who will then provide services they need to help them become employed. Ticket holders can assign their tickets where they want to. Employment Networks will not necessarily always accept every ticket--if the person needs service in areas that they do not provide services. When the Ticket is assigned, the Employment Network and the Ticket holder work out a plan for employment and the Employment Network will provide or purchase the services that are needed. All of this is done at no cost to the Ticket holder who assigned his/her Ticket. There is no money given/reimbursed to the Employment Network until the person has become employed and is earning more than "Substantial Gainful Activity." The money that is then given to the Employment Network is not a payment for services but is a "reward" for a job well done in helping this person with a disability work...”*.

Therefore, it is highly suggested that if people with disabilities can manage resources, they will better determine solutions to their challenges.

Educational issue

Many participants underlined the importance and the essentiality of education for PWD.

The main points included:

- New work skills for acquired disability during working life
- Educational empowerment of children in pastoral nomadic communities
- Rehabilitation of disabled adolescents with a history of imprisonment
- Teaching all children about disability
- Integration of people with disability into all levels of education
- Providing technology and training to PWD

Penny states that: *“many people acquire a disability during their working lives. They may have good work experience and many of the transferable skills that employers want but may need to change their career direction due to the disability. Consequently they may need retraining to gain new work skills - and there is still a range of problems in ensuring that the providers of such training can meet the needs of disabled people. So they may not be able to make that change because the system is not geared up to make the adjustments”*.

Some participants introduced into the discussion specific elements that should be given particular attention when the role of intermediaries is at issue.

The situation of disabled youth in nomadic communities - for instance - often results in rural-urban migration, absence of advocates, and employment discrimination. The recommended solutions would be intensive focus on childhood education (educational empowerment) and efforts to change negative attitudes of the society towards the disabled youth.

Some other participants explored the link between disability and crime - particularly learning disabilities and mental health issues. Young people with criminal convictions and possibly a history of imprisonment find employment even more difficult to achieve. State-Federal Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies in the U.S., such as VESID in New York State and the Centre for Adolescent Rehabilitation (C-Far) in the U.K. are working in this area.

Integrating people with disabilities education at all levels means that no prejudice, no obstacle, can limit the possibility of expressing their attitudes, we have to look at the whole person rather than her/his disability. Margaret Peat in her e-mail to Glenda states *“As head of St Loye's College, a residential training college for people with disabilities, I was aware that in many instances the disability was the factor which opened up opportunities for our students for a better life. Don't misunderstand me - people with disabilities have many hurdles to overcome before they get to a place like St Loye's - but we found that the other 'baggage' like frequent 'knocks' in confidence, poverty and isolation were by far the greater problems. Once staff had started to help the student build their self esteem, we could work on matching their employment aim with the vocational training and the support needed to make them employable, including literacy and numeracy support. Working with students and employers in this way, looking at the whole person rather than just their disability was very successful in achieving sustained employment”*.

Governmental policies

From the e-discussion it emerged that the attention of governments to facilitate the role of the intermediaries in helping people with disabilities, should include prioritizing the childhood education (educational empowerment), adapting the workplace (accessibility), allowing flexible hiring rules (The Office of Personnel Management plans to introduce a pair of reforms designed to give federal agencies more hiring flexibility), the establishment of flexible working hours (in the EU there are policies to making labour markets more flexible, i.e. part time jobs; the promotion of teleworking), facilitating new initiatives (mentoring day, microfinancing, and Forums on disability).

Public policy effort was the topic of the **fourth week** of the e-discussion.

From Belize we learned that Peter August had been actively involved with a few pro-disability organizations that have, from time to time, been lobbying Government to adapt legislations that would give some recognition to persons with disabilities and especially to youths in this category. Peter August states that: *“It has been a rather frustrating experience for many years trying to get Government to understand the plight of persons with disabilities, much less to do anything about it. It has been an uphill struggle with very little achievement. Perhaps parents and care givers have not been sufficiently forceful to advocate for the rights of their children, but it seems generally that this subject bears no priority in the eyes of the legislators and, in fact, there is a lack of concern where Government agencies are concerned.”*

In Switzerland, Simone Berchtold, stated that they have just begun to put in place laws against the discrimination of people with disabilities. Simone writes that *“we only begun to talk about anti discrimination law around 1995 and then Marc Sutter member of the Parliament launched an initiative which wanted the right for disabled people not to be discriminated against in the Swiss constitution but it was refused by the Swiss voters on May 18 2003 and so the law and accompanying texts came in to force on January 1st 2004”*. The law states that nobody can be discriminated against because of race, handicap, and religion and so on. In the new law it is overall the public institutions that are to adapt to the need of people with disabilities in domains such as public transport, building, services schools, education and professional life. On the three last domains the law is rather vague but they are hoping in Switzerland that this state is going to improve. The law does not specifically

address the question of transition between school and work life but it says that all the governmental offices and departments must be accessible so that people with disabilities can work and that they have equal access to work. Simone Berchtold concluded his first message by writing *"I often think that things for PWD would change if a PWD would be president or minister of a country."*

Duncan Blackman from Canada states that *"since last fall, I've been conducting a jurisdictional review to obtain information and gain insight concerning the provision and funding of transition services based on assessed need and individualized approaches with a focus on the provinces and territories of Canada specifically on service options for people with intellectual disabilities."* He found several Community Services, the Developmental Services Branch (MCSS) of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, which support transition from school to community life. The goal of this program is for each participant to have the knowledge and skills necessary to make a successful transition from school to community-based activities, community living and work opportunities. The key elements of this unique initiative are the emphasis on individualized approaches, community partnerships and an active role for parents in the design and delivery of the supports. Over the past four years, \$15 million has been invested to serve over 1,750 people. There are a number of initiatives aimed at building or expanding community capacity which is being coordinated with business organizations and the community colleges. A number of these projects are structured to enable the individual to move into employment situations. Families are involved in the design and monitoring of some of these programs.

The Newfoundland Department of Health & Community Services - Policy & Program Services Branch developed the Model for Co-ordination of Services to Children and Youth with Special Needs includes a planning mechanism, the Individual Support Service Plan, which would include a determination of what is needed to facilitate the transition to adult services.

British Columbia is in a state of flux with a planned move of their services to a community-based and governed organization. However, current Ministry (Adult Community Living Services Policy Branch, Ministry for Children and Family Development) documentation places the onus on families to initiate the transition planning. Families should generally start planning for their child's transition to adulthood by the time he/she is 16 years old. A transition plan team and a transition plan should be developed to address potential adult needs

and the skills the child needs to learn during the high school years. The transition from services for children and youth to adult services ideally involves the child, family, service providers, school professionals and ministry staff in the planning process, as services may be provided through a number of ministries.

Blackman Duncan points that *"My general observation has been that services for children and youth are handled by different departments and branches of the provincial governments. A typical problem is poor communication and coordination amongst these services. Unfortunately the problem does not appear to have been addressed in any systematic manner and has a lengthy history."*

In Kosovo we learned from Hiljmnijeta Apuk that one of their main efforts was to organize an 'umbrella' forum to create a lobby group for disability advocacy and provide coordination and logistical support for the civil sector active in this field. They have also been successful providing direct help on a grass roots level to many people with disabilities in getting education and employment.

Mary Okiaama from Kenya shared that they launched the Kenyan decade for people with disabilities and plan of action this April. Her opinion is *"It was a little late I would say since the African decade of people with disabilities was launched way back in 1998. Other than this April's plan of action, I would say that not much in terms of public policy arrangements has taken place on the Kenyan scene. The aim of the plan of action is to find Kenyan solutions to the challenges facing Kenyans with disabilities and place the needs of people with disabilities on the government's social and economic agenda....We hope that the decade will sensitise all our policy makers to the needs of Kenyans with disabilities and be reflected in the policies and development plans. Only time will tell whether what has been laid down in the plan of action will become reality in the lives of Kenyans with disabilities. The launch was led by our Minister for sports and Gender but bearing in mind the fact that there is no department in his ministry for people with disabilities; we can only hope that a department is established soon and that more growth and development will follow. Transition planning is not prescribed for in our laws and we hope that it will be provided for as implementation of the Plan of action for the Kenyan Decade of People with disabilities gets underway. It is not provided for under other pieces of legislation either and consequently, post school adult tracking has not been developed as yet. Since the plan of action is only a few weeks old, I guess the issue of policy*

makers success can only be answered at a later stage in the development of our disability laws”.

The facilitator for the week, Thomas Golden, shared that in the United States the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides the statutory and stemming regulatory requirements in the United States pertaining to transition planning for youth. This is marginally built on by other federal legislation (e.g. the Workforce Investment Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Social Security Act) that does seek to create other incentives to promote transition planning although that is not to suggest that the US policy infrastructure could not be greatly improved. Thomas Golden concludes that: “*In the US, family members and other advocacy organizations have played a critical role in advocating for and ensuring transition protections in law. Again, that is not to say that we cannot continue to expand the provision of these types of services and supports, but we do have some highly effective practices upon which to build.*”

In most countries the governmental units that oversee education for youth should have oversight the responsibility for transition, although many countries expressed that they do not currently have laws governing this area at this time. It also became clear that minimal efforts have been undertaken to track post-school outcomes of youth with disabilities, although in the United States, some longitudinal tracking has been undertaken as well as state-specific tracking.

Several obstacles were noted throughout the discussion. These included the lack of education and training for parents to equip them to be effective lobbyists and very few individuals with disabilities are in positions of authority, elected position and government.

In Belize, a small country in the heart of Central America with a population of about 275,000, the size of the country and economy seems to pose a barrier for Government to place any priority on the services to persons with disabilities. However, Peter says “*as you have suggested, I would appreciate receiving any sample legislation that I can look at and possibly get other parents or interested parties to make submissions to the legislature to get them adapted. There is a recently formed group which has been advocating on behalf of persons with disabilities and especially youths*”.

Alexander Tetteh from the Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled (GSPD) shared that GSPD is a national organization of persons with physical disabilities in Ghana. They comprise all the 10 regions with a total membership of about 5,050 people. The mission of the

organization is to seek the welfare of its members by creating awareness of their capacities and the capabilities, lobbying and advocating for their rights and responsibilities. Alexander says that *"The situation of disabled youth employment in Ghana is very alarming. The Government is doing very little about it. Almost everyday the number of disabled beggars on the street increase. PWDs went on the street in January this year to express our displeasure about the delay in pass the Disability bill"*.

From Belize we learned that a few parent groups have been developing and have been bringing some pressure on Government as a result of which there have been some attention given to the cause. There have been talks of passing into law some of the policies developed over the years but this may take some time yet. In the US, family members and other advocacy organizations have played a critical role in advocating for and ensuring transition protections in law. However, this does not mean there is not further room to continue expanding the provision of these types of services and supports. Some participants did feel that they do have some highly effective practices upon which to build. In Bangladesh Ayub Nabi Molla, the general secretary/chief executive of Save the Planet and Disability (SPD), states that: *"SPD has been implementing Disability-based human development training, vocational training, Primary health care, Health-based training, AIDS prevention campaigning, Sanitation, Environmental pollution prevention, referral for treatment and treatment support, Special Education, Integrated education, Disability employment rehabilitation, Primary health rehabilitation, Schooling, Advocacy and Lobbying, Job placement and job creation, Individual Income Generating Project, recreation, movement support, Credit support, etc. and achieved tremendous achievements. But we could not attract the big and big donors for the development of the persons with disabilities of the remote area of Bangladesh, which area has been neglected for 250 years"*. He continues to humbly seek support to expand their services in these outlying regions.

Nafeesur Rahman of the National Forum of Organizations working with the Disabled (NFOWD) people in Bangladesh, following an earlier posting made on this e-discussion group, writes that *"A few months back, at a public meeting, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh declared a separate 1% quota in all cadre service jobs in the Government of Bangladesh specifically for persons with disabilities. Taking a cue from that, the Ministry of Social Welfare and the Depart of Social Services is working hard to find positive ways to actually bring this declaration into practice. A high level committee has been formed and they are*

looking at all the pros & cons, and other rules and regulations etc. that have been found to impede the quota system in the past. Since NFOWD is the only recognized national coordination body of NGOs, with also the right kind of experience in this field in Bangladesh, and also since we have always been working as an interface between the Government and the NGOs in this field here, - we have been brought into this committee. We have been asked to help by also putting together a sort of a list of the jobs that could be taken up by people with disabilities, according to the type and grade of disability. We often passionately say that there are practically no jobs that are impossible for people with disabilities! But we do need to consider that, in a developing country like ours, we cannot afford many of the highly sophisticated gadgets or assistive devices that are widely used in some highly developed countries. So we do recognize that there are many jobs that could be extremely difficult, if not impossible for people with disabilities. But that may also mean that we are undermining the potentials of some very talented disabled persons. We ARE treading on VERY thin ice here!!!”

Conclusive remarks

This report presents the results of the e-discussion, which was designed to solicit ideas and gather information on good job practices, thereby contributing to the ongoing work of academic and international institutions. The goal of the discussion was to generate input that can help guide the development agenda and ensure the inclusion of disabled youth.

Global electronic discussions are often used by the World Bank to obtain stakeholder feedback, to learn from others, to share and broadening perspectives. There has been very little work done on assessing e-discussions, even though anecdotal evidence indicates that these events have provided valuable feedback that would not have been available otherwise. For the primary goal of the study, i.e. capturing and sharing knowledge on good practices of job creation, the e-discussion represented a very effective way to reach a good cross-section of stakeholders to share their experiences and insights. By adopting a bottom-up approach, i.e. going through the individuals, as opposed to the top-down approach, i.e. analysing aggregate data at national levels, a deeper insight as to possible strategies to promote disabled youth in the mainstream can be developed. Nevertheless the lesson learnt from this exercise is that the more structured the e-discussion the more focused the contributions are to the principal objectives. Future experiences would therefore encompass more precise and detailed formats.

The conclusion from this participatory exercise is that there are no quick and easy recipes, nor magic formulas, for creating jobs for disabled youth.

Each country must address the integration of disabled youth in its own way, taking into account its unique cultural, legal, economic and social environments. However, it is worthwhile examining the knowledge base, trends and many experiences from developed and developing countries in order to design more effective interventions that incorporate best practices and avoid errors of the past. In general, it is important to design and implement a set of converging coordinated measures with a multi-sectoral approach.

It is essential to begin with the families of disabled youth, creating awareness about the potentialities of the disabled and promoting behaviours that can nourish those potentialities and reduce barriers. Stigma is often the toughest barrier to full inclusion. Communication campaigns aimed at local communities and society at large are needed to: help raise awareness, increase knowledge on disability issues, change attitudes and promote the

adoption of positive behaviours. These campaigns may use role models and testimonials to fight stigma.

Employers, however, should be approached from a business perspective. Creating favourable conditions for integrating disabled youth into the labour market involves skill development among such youth, incentives from policy makers (e.g. to encourage work place adaptation, fiscal incentives for inclusion of disabled workers, etc.), assistance/facilitation from “intermediaries” (families, DPOs, the formal education system, organizations offering informal or vocational training, supported employment agents) and “business to business” sharing experiences.

The best way to respond to the needs and expectations of disabled youth is to enlist their active participation in crafting policies and services targeted to them. Policy makers, employers, families and communities should involve disabled youth at every step—from needs assessment, design, and actual implementation of interventions, to monitoring and evaluating them.

Additional Readings and Websites

1. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DISABILITY/Resources/Employment-and-Traning/Disability_Employment_Policy.pdf
2. Website: Company Disability Toolkit. This website was developed to help employers in the UK to help them achieve “best disability practices.” It features a comprehensive checklist. For more information: www.disabilityaware.org.
3. Books: the US Department of Education and the US Chamber of Commerce jointly developed Disability Employment 101. It includes information about how to find qualified workers with disabilities and employment research into practices and how to model what other businesses have done. See www.edpubs.org/webstore/Contents/search.asp.
4. National Collaborative Workforce and Disability/Youth (NCWD) publication on intermediary roles www.ncwd-youth.info
5. www.AbilityAsia.org - guidance and general ideas from the ILO
6. Information about IBM hiring of people with disabilities, including their work with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf as an Intermediary www.workforce.com/section/09/feature/23/74/24/indexhtml
7. The Center on Human Policy has a new web-based project to help teachers at the middle and high school levels integrate disability studies into the regular school curriculum. The title of the project is "Disability Studies for Teachers" and it can be accessed at: www.disabilitystudiesforteachers.org. The web site includes lesson plans, organized according to units (topics), with background essays and links to a variety of publicly accessible web sites containing historical source documents. It also has essays on why teachers should include disability in their teaching and on "differentiated instruction" (how to adapt the curriculum for diverse learning styles).
8. For businessman who want to sell products and services at the global level or want to share experiences, ideas and information join the Blind Businessmen list by sending a blank e-mail at blindbusinessmen-subscribe@yahoogroups.com
9. PRD-L (Poverty Reduction and Disability Listserver) is a listserver for people who want to use email to discuss issues, or share resources information and ideas, related to poverty reduction among people with disabilities of any age in developing countries. This is currently a very quiet list: sometimes days or weeks go by between posts. But I think it has the potential to become an interesting and informative list if enough people participate. To join, contact the listowner, PATRICK BURKE, at: burke@ucla.edu or you can also sign up via the web at: <http://lists.ucla.edu/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/prd-l>.
10. The Intl-Dev (International Development) email distribution list distributes announcements about job opportunities, internship opportunities, possible funding sources for research related to international development, and so forth. To join,

contact the

listowner AMY WILSON at: amy.wilson@gallaudet.edu) Or, you can also sign up for Intl-Dev via the web at: <http://gri.gallaudet.edu/mailman/listinfo/intl-dev>.

11. Deafintl (Deaf Empowerment and Advancement Fellowship INTernational List) - deafintl is for people who share an interest in economic, social, human, political, educational, and health issues related to deaf people in developing countries. Deafintl has more than 250 deaf and hearing members from more than 30 developing and developed countries. Participants use email to exchange information, ideas, advice, and resources related to the empowerment of deaf people in developing countries, just like we have been doing for the past few weeks. Like PRD-L, deafintl is usually very quiet -- often days or weeks go by between posts. But deafintl has existed since 1998, and when people do post, it is often very interesting. To learn more about deafintl, or to join up, contact: owner-deafintl@waste.org or you can follow the instructions on the deafintl web site at: <http://patriot.net/~ashettle/deafintl>

12. In Australia there was an initiative for the development of practical technical aids and assistive technology for PWD. They have a book of practical designs for PWD. See <http://www.technicalaidnsw.org.au/resources/tabook.html> for a copy of the TADAID Book. The TAD (Technical Aid to the Disabled) organization seeks to develop local solutions to complex problems by teaming up individuals with technicians who design the aids required by the person in their environment. For more information see <http://www.technicalaidnsw.org.au/index.html>

13. Trace Research & Development Center
<http://www.trace.wisc.edu/>
Traumatic Brain Injury Resource Guide
<http://www.neuroskills.com/~cns/fmlywks.html>
ADAPT of Texas
<http://www.adapt.org/>
Oklahoma ABLE Tech Assistive Technology Project of Oklahoma
<http://okabletech.okstate.edu/>
The Ability Project
<http://www.ability.org/>
Assistive Technology and Occupational Therapy
<http://www.swattech.com/>
EnableLink (Canadian)
<http://www.enablelink.org/>
The Canadian Abilities Foundation
http://www.enablelink.org/about_abilities.html
Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association of Canada.
<http://www.sbhac.ca/>
Disabled Peoples' International
<http://www.dpi.org/>
Web Accessibility Initiative
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>
Microsoft Accessibility and Disabilities Site
<http://microsoft.com/enable/>

Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies

<http://www.crd.s.org/>

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/nidrr/index.html?src=mr>

tell-us-your-story.com is a disability discussion forum for those of us with disabilities

<http://www.tell-us-your-story.com/>

National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research

<http://www.ncddr.org/>

disABILITY Information and Resources

<http://www.makoa.org/>

National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials

<http://www.nchrtm.okstate.edu/>

News & Advocacy in Disability Rights

<http://www.mainstream-mag.com/>

the Brejcha Personal and disABILITY Resource Site

<http://www.netreach.net/~abrejcha/>

Alliance for Technology Access

<http://www.ataccess.org/>

Kennedy Krieger Institute

<http://www.kennedykrieger.org/>

APPENDIX : Success Stories

Joshua R. Beal (USA)

I am currently working at The World Bank in Washington D.C. as a disability research assistant where I help oversee the Eastern Central Asia (ECA) loan portfolio for disability components. I recently graduated from the University of Hawaii in December of 2003 with a BA in Economics. Shortly thereafter I moved to Washington DC and found my current position after only 2 job interviews. I am deaf.

I must state that before I moved here to Washington DC, I had a fair amount of success in Hawaii obtaining and maintaining employment. I also was a self-made model and actor while working a night job in the restaurant industry and going to the University during the day.

Beginning with demand, I must say that any type of employment is relatively dependent on the economic demands of the region. In Hawaii, the economy is mainly dependent on tourism, my first job in Hawaii was working in a restaurant. This job was fairly accessible to me because I have mobility, good communication skills, and most importantly, experience. I acquired experience working in the restaurant industry when I was still in high school. I began working at a small hotel during the summers and began working full-time at two restaurants before I moved out to Hawaii. Prior to this, **I was encouraged by my parents** to follow my entrepreneurial

Suzanne M. van den Bercken (Netherlands)

I was still in Kindergarden (4 to 5 years old) as I started to bring letters to the mail box, empty glass bottles to the glass container, bringing the garbage from the garage to the sidewalk on Tuesday morning. Some years later I walked dogs for neighbours, washed cars, did little shopping (like buying eggs at the farm for elderly). I

instincts. I began working when I was 8 years old by washing cars and mowing lawns for my neighbours. After doing that for several years, I began carrying a paper route, delivering newspapers every morning before I went to school.

I used this income to purchase small luxuries such as skateboards, bicycles, and later I bought my first car at the age of 17. This habit of working on my own gave me the confidence to approach other people and offer my services in exchange for payment. Also, I had the luxury of watching my father and my father's family, all entrepreneurs, own their own businesses. This gave me the impression from an early age of what was needed to become successful working on my own. For this reason, I believe the environment around us is very important in promoting how to work independently.

With experience and references, I was able to obtain a new position when I moved to Hawaii in 1994. This does not mean that the position came easily. I had to make a resume, print it up without a computer, and without the help of others. I also had to seek out jobs that would be fitting for my skills. I also found that newspaper ads are usually the last resort for any job-hunter. I believe that it is best to rely on personal contacts or focus on jobs that are in your immediate area as to minimize competition with other job-seekers.

also always have been participating in activities outdoors and indoors with fully sighted people. I did not go to scouting for the blind, but to the normal scouting next doors. I did not go to the Sunday school class for disabled children but to the normal class.

I started my first job on contract base when I was 14 as moderator of 3 areas on a bulletin board system. After one year my

employer decided to sell the bulletin board to another company, including all employees. This new company kept me for half a year and then tried to dismiss me because they were going to convert the BBS into a website and I (still working with MS Dos that time and legally blind) could not browse the internet and therefore would not be valuable for the for them any longer. With the help of our information technology teacher at high school and one of my dearest colleagues I managed to find software to browse the Internet with MS Dos. The reason the company gave me to fire me was no longer valid and so they took me for another 6 months. I have had many

accessibility problems with that website and although they were willing to solve the problems, I had to explain things to them and come up with solutions. It has been a tough time in which I often felt left alone, but now I can say I have become an experienced web accessibility advisor. I have had many times like this, in which it looked like I would lose my job but I always found a way to keep the job. **It all depends on willpower and creativity.** I found software that solved my problems. I convinced people by keeping talking and discussing and demonstrating my abilities to them.

Nafees (Bangladesh)

“In Bangladesh, we have had some very successful models of Microfinance - namely the BRAC and the Grameen Bank models - which have earned name and fame across the globe. We have over 25,000 NGOs working in Bangladesh, and if you ask what is the most common program they are running, it should be microfinance. There should be over 150 organizations working on Disability who are also running MF programs, who have mainstreamed people with disabilities in their existing programs quite successfully. Yes they also have to

contribute with deposits before accessing the loans, but this deposits come in small instalments, usually at a weekly basis, and amounts from BD Taka 5-25 (USD1 = BDT60), depending on the NGO and its size of loans. The people with disabilities are part of a group (of about 20-25 people) and often family members are also included into the groups. People can generally expect to get a loan once they have been saving for about 15-20 weeks (this also depends on the NGOs). So you see the deposits are not too burdensome”.

Howard Wallack

“Hi - I'm Howard Wallack, Director of Goodwill Global, the strategic business unit of Goodwill Industries International, Inc. responsible for new business development outside the U.S. and Canada. In my career I've had experience with programs in more than 65 countries, both industrialized and those in various stages of economic growth and transition, and am heartened by the depth of experiences from such a vast community participating in this e-discussion.....

I'd like to provide two specific examples of a collaborative linkage that has taken such an integrated approach. In Panama, our associate member Asociación Panameña de Industrias de Buena Voluntad (Goodwill Panama), has an effective "Alliance with Business and Industry". This is a formal,

negotiated memorandum of understanding (MOU) whereby Goodwill Panama commits itself to training persons with disabilities for the production and service needs of the Chamber's member businesses, and the Chamber commits itself to promoting continuously employment of persons with disabilities with its member businesses. The effort has numerous benefits: dependability of the employees, increased productivity and growth in revenues..... Additionally, in Ecuador, another Goodwill associate member, the Fundación Nueva Vida has had notable success in the Manos Unidas project (United Hands), in which persons with disabilities operate a candy cart with merchandise to sell, form a micro-enterprise and, through a three-way agreement between the Foundation, the municipal city government, and CONADIS

(National Council on Disabilities), receive the necessary business permits to operate. The program has directly benefited 250 persons with disabilities in 4 cities, and indirectly benefited 750 family members. Thirty percent of the beneficiaries have expanded their businesses (moving initially from a mobile cart to fixed kiosk operation),

Paul Newman

“Tripod is project that Susan Scott Parker of the Employers' Forum on Disability and I are working on advising officials of the Department of Work and Pensions concerning how employers can be engaged to recruit and retain employees with disabilities. As you know the Forum has approaching 400 employer members who employ over 20% of the UK working population and has a lot of experience in advising employers on how to make it easier for them. We have adopted a structure for looking at employer engagement based upon work that has been done for us by Work Structuring

Vashkar Whattacheerjee

“Few thinks from my life. My family didn't know where I should go to school, because people in Bangladesh think that blind people can do nothing. Most people think that it is impossible for a blind person to get an education. My family was very frustrated. My father heard from an eye doctor that that there was a primary school for the blind in Chittagong, and I was admitted to that school. After leaving that primary school, I attended a junior high school for sighted children. It was very hard for me, because there were no Braille books, and the teachers did not know how to teach blind children. After leaving junior high school, I also went to a high school for sighted students. After leaving the primary school for the blind and entering mainstream education, I discovered that there was a lack of facilities for blind people. at junior high and high school, there were no Braille books, very few writing frames and Braille paper. After leaving high school, I tried to enter many universities, but they all refused my application because of my blindness. Therefore, some other blind applicants and I began a hunger strike.

and an association of confectioners with disabilities has been formed. It's an example of how micro enterprises for/by persons with disabilities can be promoted and created, with appropriate institutional links that eliminate or minimize barriers for market entry, can be sustained”

Ltd. There is nothing particularly sophisticated or new about the approach. We believe that success occurs when the three parties to any recruitment or retention process are working effectively together. The three parties are employers, disabled job seekers and intermediary (brokering) organisations. They all need to be committed (engaged), prepared (equipped) and actually doing something (delivering). We call it Tripod because of the three legs. At each stage of the process, we know there are potential obstacles to successful outcomes and we're interested in building our knowledge of those”.

Suddenly, the university decided to let us enter, but again there were no facilities. The university teachers didn't know anything about Braille or how to teach blind students. Some of the teachers cooperated with us, but some did not. For example, one day in class I was taking notes on my Braille slate, but the teacher thought I was playing. He told me to stop playing, stand up and leave the room. I complained to the head of the department, and I showed the teacher who had asked me to leave his class that I had actually been taking continued.....notes, not playing. He was very surprised when I read my Braille notes to him. He thought it was like magic. An example of a problem I faced is when I invited a government high official to a seminar about white cane safety day. When I entered his office, he gave me some money and didn't talk to me. This is because he thought that blind people are beggars. After he had given me the money, I was very shocked, and I could not stop my tears. I gave my invitation letter to him, and suddenly he realized what he had done. He apologized, and eventually came to the seminar, and said that he had come to learn about visually impaired people. After birth, there were no hospitals or doctors in my

village. I bled from my nose and mouth. My family did not do anything. When I was two years old, my family realized that I was blind, and their dreams about my future were shattered

What is the most popular job of the blind in Bangladesh? This is a difficult question to answer. Very few blind people in Bangladesh have a job. Most of them are still begging in the road. Some of the blind people who have jobs work as teachers in schools for the blind, as lawyers, or in NGOs. Even if a blind person receives a university education, it is often very difficult for him to find a job. I like to meet and make friends with many different people. I like singing and dancing. I am a member of a musical group composed entirely of blind people in my country. I've been studying hard to achieve my goals. Did you know that in my country we have no Braille libraries? Because of this, I have been studying how to set up a Braille library? I hope to set up a Braille library in Bangladesh one day. I also want to start a centre for the blind where people can learn about Bangladeshi culture, receive education, and study how to use computers. I think that reading, writing, and finding information by computer are vital tools for blind people to live independently. Of course, they cannot afford to buy a

computer, but they could come to my centre and use a computer freely. For this reason, I need to learn much more, and I would like to cooperate with all the organizations and individuals to achieve this dream. I would like to give you some information about visually impaired people in my country. In Bangladesh we have 130 million people. 10 per cent are disabled. 1,2 million people are blind. However, only 1 per cent of blind people are educated. Life for girls is Especially difficult, because they have no chance to marry, find a job or receive an education. Most blind people come from very poor families. We don't have any good advocacy organizations for blind people which could campaign for our rights. Now, disabled people: organizations are gaining strength, but blind people: organizations are not included. organizations work in Bangladesh, of course, but they do not seem to think about blind people. I don't know if the World Blind Union is thinking about Bangladesh. However, last year at the Osaka Blind Summit, there was no representative from Bangladesh, so I asked many questions to the WBU president on behalf of Bangladeshi blind people. I would like to appeal now to all of you visually impaired people Now is the time to help the visually impaired in Bangladesh.

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