

Next Steps in Implementing the UNCRPD for Developing Countries: What Donors Need to Know

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Return to Work in the Context of the UNCRPD
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Background for Comments

- Thirty-five years experience in disability policy formulation
- Disability social insurance background
- Comparative disability policy expertise: emphasis on return to work
- Twenty years consulting internationally – more than 50 countries
- Last dozen years mostly for World Bank and ILO
- Predominantly in ECA region and Africa

What Has this Experience Taught Me?

- Always carry at least one business suit in carry on luggage!
- Despite ratifying the UNCRPD, many countries have serious societal deficits
- Still rely on medical model
- Approach to disability is medically driven
- Focus is on loss, not remaining abilities
- Approach is “what can a person still do who is now...”?
- Majority of effort on gaining a benefit, not return to work



Why is this the Situation?

- For ECA countries, former Soviet “defectology” model still prevalent
- For African and Asian countries, problem is more cultural stigma
- Result of both – little to no expertise in assessing function, especially remaining function
- Whatever rehab focus that exists is medical only
- Once medically rehab ends – client sent home, game over



Problems of the Current Situation Concerning Work

Huge gaps in societal infrastructures:

- Inaccessible built environments
- Unsafe or unregulated working conditions
- Vast number of workers in “gray” economy
- No university curriculum in Vocational Rehabilitation
- No public sector examples of government as a model employer
- Quota/fine systems used to punish employers
- Labor laws treat all disabled workers as people who are sick, needing special privileges

Other Problems that Impact on People with Disabilities Working

- No right to education for children with disabilities
- Even if right exists, usually very limited opportunities
- No formal pedagogy in Special Education
- Some countries are including children with disabilities in mainstream schools, but they are ignored, no knowledge of how to teach them.
- Parent NGOs often try to fulfill role of public sector as educators but very small scale, limited expertise

What is Needed?

To meet UNCRPD goals, donor countries and international lenders need to provide funding for:

- Development of missing disciplines i.e., vocational rehabilitation, Special Education, promotion of occupational safety
- University-level capacity building in VR curriculum development
- Promotion of exchanges, training opportunities and partnerships with Western universities and professional rehabilitation organizations
- Study tours for labor ministry and employment personnel in Western disability accommodation practices
- Training for key governmental personnel on government as a model employer and purchaser