

INTERSECTORIAL AND INTERAGENCIES COORDINATION IN MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY ISSUES

By:

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Inter-Sctoral and Inter-Agency Coordination in Mainstreaming Disability Issues

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INTRODUCTION

Mainstreaming disability issues has been the major focus of the Disability Programme of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), as it is the most effective and inclusive approach to solve issues faced by persons with disabilities. The other focus has been the empowerment of persons with disabilities through assisting the development of self-help organizations of persons with disabilities in the region.

The Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002, was proclaimed by Commission resolution 48/3 to promote the full participation and equality of persons with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region. ESCAP has been in a position to strengthen the capacity of Governments in the ESCAP region in achieving the full participation and equality of persons with disabilities. Throughout the Decade, the mainstreaming of disability issues has been promoted through advocating multisectoral/intersectoral collaboration and interagency coordination within the region.

I. Multisectoral /intersectoral collaboration

The Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons was adopted at the regional meeting to launch the Decade, held in Beijing in December 1992. It clearly embodies a multisectoral collaboration approach. The Agenda for Action consists of the following 12 policy areas: national coordination, legislation, information, public awareness, accessibility and communication, education, training and employment, prevention of causes of disabilities, rehabilitation services, assistive devices, self-help organizations, and regional cooperation. Each of the policy categories contains a list of areas of concern of direct relevance to the development of policies in support of the full participation and equality of people with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.

As you can see, various ministries are required to implement recommendations under each policy category. For example, in the areas of accessibility and communication it is recommended that the built environment should be made accessible for persons with disabilities. This requires legislation and regulations, policy development and programme implementation by ministries responsible for construction, housing and infrastructure development as well as public transport at the national and subnational levels. In the area of communication, it is necessary that ministries responsible for telecommunication, and information dissemination be involved in order to guarantee full access to public information for persons with disabilities.

One of ESCAP's flagship programmes has been the promotion of non-handicapping physical environments. ESCAP developed regional guidelines on the promotion of non-handicapping physical environments for persons with disabilities through organizing an expert group meeting and a regional meeting. The guidelines cover planning and building design, access policy provisions and legislation, and the promotion of public awareness to improve access. Pilot projects were also designed to generate demonstration sites under ESCAP developing country conditions. The pilot projects were implemented in three cities: Bangkok, Beijing and New Delhi. In each city, a pilot project site of approximately one square-kilometre was selected and made accessible.

Targeted at the three sites, national training workshops for architects, urban planners and persons with disabilities, and technical exchange among the three sites were undertaken during a one-year project period. As outcomes, actual accessibility improvements were achieved at all three sites. In Bangkok, nearly 5,000 points of ramp access were made and 15 kilometres of footpaths with Braille blocks were installed. In Beijing, 23 targets in residential, commercial and educational facilities were made accessible. In New Delhi, 14 public buildings and their external environment became accessible.

During the project period, active legislative development was seen in the three countries. In Thailand, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration guidelines on access

improvements were issued, and ministerial regulations on access were drafted and tabled for consideration. In China, rules and regulations to strengthen the implementation of the Design Code were formulated and its enforcement, especially with regards to all new construction, was tightened. In India, model building by-laws concerning the provision of facilities for disabled persons were formulated and circulated nationwide in English and Hindi.

The pilot projects led Governments to examine policies and programmes concerning accessibility for people with disabilities and the issuance of improved regulations on accessibility, in addition to the physical improvement of the pilot project sites.

As you can see in this project, ESCAP has been working with multiple stakeholders, including ministries of urban development, construction, transport, social welfare departments as well as municipal governments in different countries, including different levels of personnel, such as policy-makers, architects, urban planners, civil engineers, transport engineers, designers, persons with diverse disabilities and their self-help organizations.

At the beginning of the project, some ministries of construction did not wish to send its representatives to a regional meeting, stating the ministry did not deal with disability issues, and directed us to contact the Ministry of Social Welfare. They did not consider access issues under their jurisdiction. However, this misunderstanding does not happen any more.

As the Decade progressed, the multisectoral/intersectoral approach has clearly gained ground at the government level. Whenever Governments are asked to make country reports, they have to consult different ministries concerned in each policy category, such as education, health, employment, construction, housing, and public transport, in order to obtain accurate information on progress made in the 12 policy categories under the Agenda for Action. The Agenda for Action has become an

effective policy tool to promote multisectoral/intersectoral collaboration among different ministries and sectors at the national level.

In addition to the above-mentioned 12 policy areas, ESCAP has been incorporating into the mainstream development agenda such issues concerning women with disabilities, disability statistics, barrier-free tourism and poverty alleviation of rural persons with disabilities.

To include the issues of women with disabilities into mainstream gender equality initiatives, we organized a regional training workshop for women with disabilities in conjunction with the Asia-Pacific Summit of Women Mayors and Councillors in Phitsanulok, Thailand, in 2001. We also collaborated with the Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific and the national statistical offices of India and China in organizing subregional workshops on disability statistics, in New Delhi and Shanghai, China, in 2000 and 2001.

The Field Study-cum-Regional Seminar on Poverty Alleviation among Rural Persons with Disabilities was organized in Hyderabad, India, in December 1999, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. This seminar was the first of its kind that ESCAP organized to draw attention to the issues of poor disabled persons in the rural areas of the developing ESCAP countries.

ESCAP found new partners in the tourism sector. The Asia-Pacific Conference on Tourism for People with Disabilities, held in Bali, Indonesia, in September 2000, represented a new initiative in the area of accessibility. This conference, organized by a local NGO under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Government of Indonesia and in close collaboration with ESCAP, was the first of its kind in the ESCAP region and provided a forum for the discussion of major issues related to accessible tourism for people with disabilities. It adopted the Bali Declaration on Barrier-free Tourism for People with Disabilities. In conjunction with the Conference, ESCAP organized a training workshop and invited officials from national tourism authorities of the ESCAP developing countries. We expect that barrier-free tourism will become one of the most

popular tourism areas as it means the expansion of the tourism market not only for persons with disabilities, but also for older persons and families with children.

To implement the above-mentioned activities, ESCAP undertook a multisectoral approach within the secretariat. A comparative advantage of the ESCAP Disability Programme has been the development of active inter-divisional collaboration with various sections of other divisions, including ESCAP-UNCHS Joint Section on Human Settlements, in the promotion of non-handicapping environments; Rural Development Section, in poverty alleviation among rural disabled persons; General Transport, Coordination and Communications Section as well as Tourism Unit, in the promotion of accessible public transport and promotion of barrier-free tourism. Without such interdivisional collaboration, it would be difficult to implement activities in diverse concerns. This ESCAP example on multisectoral collaboration could serve as a good case study for other development agencies with diverse divisions within themselves, such as the Asian Development Bank.

II. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION IN THE ASIAN AND PACIFIC REGION

Throughout the Asian and Pacific Decade, a regional interagency cooperation mechanism played an important role in coordinating regional actions in the development of and monitoring the implementation of the Agenda for Actions and its targets.

During the Asian and Pacific Decade, action on partnership development aimed at generating broad support for implementation of the Agenda for Action was undertaken and the existing cooperative arrangements were continued and strengthened. The Regional Inter-agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP) Subcommittee on Disability-related Concerns (formerly known as the Asia-Pacific Inter-organizational Task Force on Disability-related Concerns), of which ESCAP served as the secretariat, was expanded and strengthened since 1992. The Subcommittee assisted the formulation of a draft Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. The

Subcommittee included 11 United Nations bodies and agencies. A wide range of service delivery and self-help non-governmental organizations in the field of disabilities joined the Subcommittee and actively participated in its activities. Representatives of Governments interested in contributing to regional cooperation also attended its sessions at no expenses to the secretariat. The regular sessions were organized twice a year. Subcommittee members had organized themselves into teams to develop regional support for the implementation of particular areas of the Agenda for Action. Members who have the mandates, competence and resources volunteer to serve as team coordinators. An important mode of Subcommittee cooperation is through the sharing of information and the pooling of expertise.

In 1996, the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns (TWGDC) replaced the RICAP Subcommittee. The primary objective of TWGDC was to sustain the momentum towards the fulfillment of the goals of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002. It has been co-chaired by ESCAP, FAO and other NGO members. The membership of TWGDC was expanded to include 50 NGOs, 15 government representatives and the Asian Development Bank. TWGDC members have been active in the review process of the achievements in the implementation of the Agenda for Action. TWGDC was an instrumental in advocating for the extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade for another decade, 2003-2012. TWGDC members have been actively involved in the formulation of the draft Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, which will be submitted for adoption at the high-level intergovernmental meeting to conclude the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002.

Under TWGDC, four task forces were organized: Education of All children and youth disabilities; Entrepreneurship; Information and communications technology (ICT) and East Timor. All four task forces have been active in exchanging information, taking joint action in advocating certain issues in their areas of concern.

The ICT task force under TWGDC coorganized with ESCAP, the Government of Thailand and Thai local NGOs the Accessibility ICT seminar for People with Disabilities at Bangkok in June 2002, the first of its kind in the region. The seminar adopted recommendations on policy/legislative guidelines concerning ICT Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities in the Asian and Pacific Region. The guidelines have been incorporated into the draft Biwako Millennium Framework for Action, and it is expected that the guidelines will be submitted as regional recommendations to the World Summit on the Information Society, which will be convened in 2003 and 2005.

The Task Force on East Timor has been also active in sharing information on development activities through meetings and e-mail correspondence to support the integration of development activities for persons with disabilities in East Timor among not only TWGDC members but also other concerned development agencies and NGOs. Through its collaboration efforts, national workshops on disability issues have been organized in East Timor. It has been reported that the national workshops have made significant impact in raising awareness on disability issues as well as creating a network among agencies and organizations working with persons with disabilities in East Timor. This type of informal information sharing among concerned agencies and organizations should be considered as the effective mode of interagency cooperation.

It is evident that without strong support at the regional level, the implementation of the unique regional Decade at the national level would have been difficult. The role of regional cooperation mechanism namely, RICAP subcommittee or TWGDC has been significant in development of policy tools to support the achievement of the regional Decade goals as well as monitoring of the implementation of such policy tools.

III. NEW FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION FOR THE NEW REGIONAL INITIATIVE

Governments In the ESCAP region proclaimed the extension of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons for another decade, 2003-2012. The high-level meeting to conclude the Decade, is expected to adopt the Biwako Millennium Framework

for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.

The Biwako millennium framework for action identified the following seven priority areas for the new decade:

- (a) Self-help organizations of persons with disabilities;
- (b) Women with disabilities;
- (c) Early intervention and education
- (d) Training and employment, including self-employment;
- (e) Access to built environments and public transport;
- (f) Access to information and communication, including information and communication technology;
- (g) Poverty alleviation through social security and livelihoods programmes.

The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action has incorporated the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and targets, and it will contribute to attaining the MDG and targets as issues relating to persons with disabilities are vital concerns to be addressed in realizing the relevant MDGs and targets. As a guiding principle, the new framework should ensure that disabled persons be an integral part of efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular, in the areas of poverty alleviation, primary education, gender and youth employment.

For example, **MDG target 1 is to halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income/consumption is less than one dollar a day.**

There is a danger that MDG's poverty eradication strategy may miss out the important vulnerable group of persons with disabilities as the targets could result in focusing on those who are easiest to bring out of the poverty group, and not those in extreme poverty, among whom disabled persons are disproportionately represented. Therefore, the draft Biwako Millennium Framework's poverty alleviation target states that Governments should **halve**, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion **of people with disabilities** whose

income/consumption is less than one dollar a day. The root causes of poverty of persons with disabilities are far more complicated and multi-faceted. Hence, this poverty alleviation target of the Biwako framework for action strongly recommends that conscious efforts should be made to include persons with disabilities in prioritized poverty target groups in the poverty reduction strategy to achieve MDGs.

One of the major goals of the draft Biwako Millennium Framework for Action is to mainstream disability issues into the development agenda such as poverty eradication through multisectoral/intersectoral collaboration and interagency cooperation. As the major stakeholder in the area of poverty alleviation, the Asian Development Bank can play a significant role in mainstreaming disability issues into the national poverty alleviation strategies.

IV. CONCLUSION

Multisectoral/intersectoral collaboration and interagency cooperation are the necessary conditions for mainstreaming of disability issues into the major development agenda. In the Asian and Pacific region, experiences in pursuance of the fulfilment of targets in many policy areas under the Agenda for Action during the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, have clearly proven such necessary conditions. In the area of accessibility, multisectoral collaboration approach has borne its fruits, as the line ministry has begun to take its full responsibility to promote accessible built environments in many countries of the region.

In the area of poverty eradication or alleviation, multisectoral collaboration and interagency cooperation have just begun. As poverty eradication is a major global development commitment that the whole United Nations system and intergovernmental agencies as well as many non-governmental organizations are engaged with, it is imperative to further strengthen multisectoral collaboration and interagency cooperation, including education, health, labour, telecommunication, economic and social development

and other fields, with a view to achieving an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific in the twenty-first century.
