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People with Disabilities in Lao PDR  
Training for Employment and Income  
Generation: Key Issues and Potential  
Strategies

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**PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN LAO PDR**

**TRAINING FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME  
GENERATION**

**KEY ISSUES AND POTENTIAL STRATEGIES**

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### **FOREWORD**

The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a small, landlocked country with a population of 4.6 million and 'least developed country' status. Most of the population lives in rural areas and relies on subsistence agriculture. Educational and skills training opportunities have been limited to date, and health care is minimal. Living standards are low and it is estimated that almost half of the population lives in poverty.

In this context, people with disabilities may not be significantly more disadvantaged than other impoverished Laotians, but it is important that they

should not be overlooked in the development activities currently underway and planned. Disabled people should be enabled to benefit from the programmes and projects which are put in place under the Government's human resource development (HRD) strategy, which is a key priority in the National Socio-Economic Development Plan 1996-2000. They should be encouraged to take part equally in education and vocational training, so that they can live independently, generate their own incomes and contribute to the national economy.

In October 1997, the International Labour Organization (ILO) commissioned an exploratory study of strategies, programmes, projects and services in place to address the employment-related needs of disabled people in Lao PDR. The study was carried out over a two-month period October to December 1997. It involved a review of relevant documentation and a six-week study visit to Lao PDR. Meetings were held with Government officials, officials of the National Medical Rehabilitation Centre representatives of trade unions, international organization, non-governmental organizations and disabled people. Field trips were undertaken in Champassack, Houaphan, Khammuane, Savannakhet and Xiengkhuang Provinces. Towards the end of the study in December 1997, Government agencies, NGOs and disabled persons were invited to attend a workshop at which the preliminary findings were presented and discussed, and feedback was obtained.

Following an outline of the situation of disabled people in Lao PDR in Section 1, the study findings are presented in the Section 2 of this report, as a backdrop to the recommendations and proposed strategies which are outlined in Section 3.

#### **ABBREVIATIONS**

##### **CBR**

Community-based Rehabilitation

##### **CSPO**

Cambodian School of Prosthetics and Orthotics

##### **DVA**

Department of Veterans' Affairs

##### **EASMAT**

East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team

##### **GTZ**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation Association)

**HRD**

Human Resource Development

**ILO**

International Labour Organization

**Lao PDR**

Lao People's Democratic Republic

**LDPO**

Lao Disabled Person's Organization

**MLSW**

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

**NCDP**

National Committee for Disabled Persons

**NGO**

Non-governmental Organization

**NMRC**

National Medical Rehabilitation Centre

**POWER**

Prosthetic and Orthotic Worldwide Education and Relief

**SCF**

Save the Children Fund

**UNCDF**

United Nations Capital Development Fund

## **UNDP**

United Nations Development Programme

## **UNICEF**

United Nations Children's Fund

## **UXO**

Unexploded Ordnances

## **WHO**

World Health Organization

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **• *Background***

Lao PDR has had a sustained growth rate of 6% in recent years. This has not yet led to a significant improvement in living standards: the country ranks poorly on the range of indicators which make up the UNDP Human Development Index, and has 'least developed country' status.

### **• *Disability incidence***

The incidence of disability in the country is likely to be high, linked to the low level of health care and widespread poverty, and the widespread landmines and other unexploded ordnances. With the exception of people disabled as a result of UXO explosions, there is no reliable information on the numbers of people with disabilities in Lao PDR.

### **○ *Policy***

At present, there is no written policy on disability in Lao PDR. The Government has, however, ratified the Proclamation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons 1993 to 2002, which aims to promote the full participation and equality of disabled persons in society. In addition, the Government's National Development Programme focuses, among other concerns, on human resources development for vulnerable groups, and is thus of relevance to disabled people, particularly in rural areas.

### **• *Legislation***

To date, several decrees concerning disabled people have been issued, relating to rehabilitation care, education and housing as well as tax exemptions. No comprehensive legislation is in place, although there are indications that human rights legislation is being planned.

• ***Co-ordination***

Responsibility for disability-related issues lies with several Ministries, including the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, with its Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education. A National Committee for Disabled Persons, chaired by a representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, was set up recently to co-ordinate disability policy and programmes, but has been relatively inactive to date.

• ***Training Provision***

People with disabilities have access to limited training opportunities. Some disabled people have benefited from the income-generating programmes and community-based rehabilitation projects of international organizations and NGOs, but the numbers are limited. There are no dedicated training programmes for disabled people, and no evidence was available on the extent to which disabled people have access to mainstream training centres.

• ***Provision for War Veterans***

Villages have been set up for war veterans and also, for disabled people. Health care is provided, along with housing. Vocational training and support for income generating activities is not provided, though.

**Recommendations**

- It is recommended that comprehensive legislation be introduced to underpin the rights of people with disabilities to equality of access to and opportunity in training and employment, and in other related areas.
- It is recommended that the NCDP be revitalised, expanded to include wider representation, particularly of disabled persons.
- Following its revitalisation, it is recommended that, as a first step, the NCDP should develop a coherent policy on disability and an action plan to improve opportunities for people with disabilities, for implementation within a specified time-frame.

- It is recommended that comprehensive information on the incidence of disability of different types be compiled, with a breakdown by gender and region among other criteria, to serve as a basis for the equitable planning and provision of services throughout the country.
- A three-pronged approach to the promotion of training and employment-related opportunities for disabled people is recommended.

- People with disabilities should be included as a target group in the training programmes to be provided in the training centres which the Government plans to establish in the near future;

- People with disabilities be included as specific target groups in the development programmes operated by the Government of Lao PDR, in co-operation with several international organizations and national and international NGOs.

- A dedicated training facility should be established to cater to the training needs of disabled people who may require additional support which cannot be provided at present in mainstream training centres. It is proposed that such a facility be developed on a pilot basis in co-operation with the National Medical Rehabilitation Centre, for those disabled people who are not likely to benefit from mainstream programmes.

- To promote the integration of disabled people into mainstream training courses and development programmes, a Disability Resource Service (DRS), should be set-up to provide technical advice and individualised support.
- Information is essential to progress in promoting the integration of disabled people into society. On the one hand, to be enabled to take their place in society and contribute to the national development effort, disabled people need to be informed about the options open to them. On the other hand, the general public and specific groups in the population (particularly employers) need to be informed about the abilities and rights of disabled people. It is recommended that the NCDP should issue information leaflets on training and employment opportunities to people with disabilities in co-operation with the Lao Disabled People's Organization, and launch awareness campaigns, targeted at employers and other key decision-makers in Lao PDR, as well as at the general public.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Economic and Social Context**

The Lao People's Democratic Republic was established in 1975, after 30 years of continuous civil war and ten years of intensive American bombing during the Vietnam war.

Transformation of its centrally planned economy towards a market economy was initiated in 1986. Agriculture is the main economic activity, contributing 55% to the gross national product, with services accounting for 24%, and industries and handicrafts for 18%, (UNDP 1997). In the decade 1986 to 1996, the national economic growth rates were comparable to those in other nations in south-east Asia, averaging 6% in the period 1991-95.

In spite of its economic growth, Lao PDR was ranked 138th out of 174 nations in the UNDP's Human Development Index in 1996. On a range of indicators - life expectancy, health expenditure per capita, employment participation, literacy, and per capita gross domestic product - it ranks significantly lower than surrounding countries. It is one of the poorest countries in the Asian and Pacific Region and has the status of 'least developed country'.

The majority of the population of 4.58 million (80%) lives in rural areas, where living standards are reported to be significantly lower than in urban areas. This was a major finding of the recent World Bank analysis of poverty incidence, based on the 1993 Lao PDR Household Expenditure and Consumption Survey, which found that over half of the rural population (53%) lived in poverty, compared to less than a quarter (24%) in urban areas (World Bank 1995). In addition to experiencing higher levels of poverty, rural areas have higher illiteracy and infant mortality rates and higher incidence of poor health than urban areas. The World Bank analysis showed that, the higher the educational level of the household head, the lower the incidence of poverty and that farming households were significantly more likely than others to be poor. It concluded that improvement in the living standard of the rural population would come about with the development of the rural infrastructure, especially roads, as access to markets and to whatever social services are in place is limited by the underdeveloped road network. It also called for increased public investment in agriculture and the development of rural markets, and the extension of credit in rural areas.

As Lao PDR has moved from a command economy to a market economy, shortages of skilled manpower have been increasingly felt and have caused bottlenecks and deficiencies in service delivery. Low levels of education and vocational training, and lack of support for income-generating activities combine to cause low productivity, limit local development, and allow the current widespread poverty to persist. Because these problems are more acute in rural areas, they need to be given high priority in development initiatives.

## **1.2 Situation of Disabled People**

As a result of the long-drawn-out conflict, and in particular, the widespread contamination of the country with unexploded ordnances (UXOs), a large number of people have become disabled, and continue to become disabled as a result of UXO explosions. A national survey of the socio-economic impact of UXOs, commissioned in 1996, reported that they were present in 25 percent of all villages in the country, and that one in three of these villages had UXO contamination in the centre of the village, presenting a severe hazard for the local people and particularly for children. UXO explosions lead to amputations, blindness, deafness and burns. Some survivors (10% approximately) have multiple injuries.

In addition to disabilities resulting from UXO explosions, the combination of widespread poverty and poor health care means that many people become disabled for other reasons - due, for example, to polio and other illnesses which go untreated or because of poor nutrition. And when people are born with a physical or mental impairment, the lack of treatment and support services lead to these becoming a barrier to their development.

On the establishment of Lao PDR in 1975, people with disabilities, like many others in the population, had very limited access to education, skills training and employment opportunities. Opportunities remain limited, although there has been some improvement in the situation recently (see Section 2.4). The main emphasis in government measures has been on disability prevention - particularly relating to UXO explosions. Given the widespread incidence of poverty in the country and the close link between poverty and disability, a concerted effort will be required to improve the status of disabled people along with that of vulnerable groups in the country as a whole, through the development of a comprehensive policy and appropriate services.

## **1.3 Disability Statistics**

Comprehensive statistics on the prevalence of disability in Lao PDR have not yet been compiled. A national survey of certain disability types, carried out by the NGO, POWER, in 1996, gives a partial picture of the incidence of certain types of physical disability (amputation and foot deformity, deafness and blindness). This survey, which covered 79% of the villages in the country, identified 28,897 people with these types of disability.

**Table 1. Disability prevalence by type of disability (1996)**

<b>Type of disability</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
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Deaf/mute	13004	45%
Foot or leg deformities	7802	27%
Blind	5201	18%
Arm or leg amputations	2890	10%
Total	28897	100%

Extrapolating the survey figures to the country as a whole, it is estimated that there are 36,578 people with amputations, foot and leg deformities, blindness or deafness overall. This represents around 0.8% of the population, and is a low prevalence rate, when compared with the WHO estimate that 10% of the population has some form of disability, which would yield a population of 458,000 people with disabilities in Lao PDR.

The regional distribution of disability identified in the study varies considerably, reflecting the different levels of UXO contamination of the different provinces in Lao PDR. 13.3% of the disabled people identified in the study were located in Savannakhet province and 11.7% in Houaphan province, compared to 1.6% in Bokeo province and 0.9% in Xaysomboune province. Prevalence rates also varied significantly - from 1.4% of the population in Houaphan and Sekong provinces to 0.4% in Bokeo and 0.2% in Vientiane Municipality (see Appendix 1).

While the study gives some indication of the prevalence of amputations among women, as distinct from men and children, it does not give a gender breakdown of the statistics on children. In addition, the study does not report on the number of women with the other types of disability surveyed. Planning of future training and employment-related services to take account of the varying gender-linked requirements is therefore difficult.

While the POWER study gives a good picture of the incidence of some disabilities (amputations and foot deformities), it underestimates the prevalence of other types (partial blindness, partial deafness), and did not examine the incidence of disability types which were outside its terms of reference (intellectual disabilities, mental health disability). This study needs to be complemented with a survey of people with intellectual disability and of these with mental health difficulties, to provide a more comprehensive information base for planners. The incidence of

partial sight loss and partial hearing loss also needs to be assessed. Existing statistics need to be broken down by gender, if possible and, where new statistics are gathered, care must be taken to ensure that the gender dimension is taken into account. Until comprehensive information on men and women with all disability types in different parts of the country has been completed, equitable planning of services for disabled people will not be possible.

#### **1.4 Lao Disabled Person's Organization**

A self-help organization of disabled people in Lao PDR - the Lao Disabled Persons' Organization (LDPO) - has been established and was in the process of securing recognition for its constitution by the Government in December 1997. This organization has already formulated an action plan aiming to improve opportunities for disabled people, with the following targets.

- skills training and education for all disabled people
- employment with specific provision for women with disabilities, self-employment and improvement in living standards
- establishment of a marketing and sales support service/centre for disabled people involved in small enterprises or self-employment.

The LDPO feels that, if these targets are achieved, disabled people will be enabled to contribute to the country's economic development.

#### **1.5 Comment**

People with disabilities in Lao PDR, like most of the population generally live in poverty and have very limited access to training and employment opportunities. It is important that, as the country develops, people with disabilities be given the opportunity to acquire skills, gain employment, generate an income and contribute to the national development effort, along with their non-disabled fellow citizens.

## **2. POLICY AND SERVICES**

### **2.1 Government Policy and Practice**

The Government of Lao PDR does not have a written policy on disability. In 1995, though, it ratified the Proclamation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, thus committing itself to working towards the goal of assuring full participation and equality of people with disabilities in society. In this context, the Government has announced its intention to strengthen its cooperation with international organizations and NGOs in order to promote the development of people with disabilities in Lao PDR (Lao Country Report, 1997).

Human resources development is one of the key priorities to be addressed as part of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan 1996-2000, which aims to continue the structural transformation of the Lao Economy and improve the living standards of Lao people. A variety of initiatives will be developed to respond to the needs of the population in different parts of the country, some of which are very remote. These initiatives include mobile training and technical assistance services for isolated communities, and better access to credit to enable villagers develop more viable enterprises. The human resources development programme covers a range of areas including health, education, employment and social security, among other concerns, and targets children, youth and women. While people with disabilities are not specifically mentioned in the National Development Plan, their status as a particularly vulnerable group should ensure their inclusion as a target group in the proposed activities, whether they are children with disabilities, youth with disabilities, women with disabilities or disabled men.

## **2.2 Legislation**

Under the Lao constitution, people with disabilities, like other citizens, have the right to equality before the law. No specific legislation has been introduced to date to guarantee this right.

The Council of Ministers has issued two decrees, assuring the right of disabled people to curative care and rehabilitation at no cost; to a livelihood; to free education; to vote; to have a dwelling place and to move their domicile. These decrees also provide for tax exemptions for disabled people engaged in certain activities - cultivation, animal husbandry and business.

In 1993, a government decree provided for the education of deaf and blind children, and a school was established in the National Medical Rehabilitation Centre in Vientiane as a first step in its implementation. In 1995, a Compulsory Education Act was introduced, making attendance at and completion of primary school obligatory for all. Schools throughout the country are now obliged to accept children with disabilities and the number of disabled children in school has increased. The inclusion of disabled children in mainstream schools has been promoted through a pilot project involving the Ministry of Education, which is signatory to the UNESCO Salamanca Declaration on Inclusive Education, and Save the Children Fund (UK).

The Labour Code of 1993 provides for workers disabled as a result of industrial accidents and the Social Security law, currently in draft form, provides for rehabilitation as well as pensions for this group.

To date, vocational training and employment for disabled people have not been provided for in law. The Government is reportedly planning to introduce human rights legislation for disabled persons, including vocational training provision for job placement and guaranteed employment, as well as building regulations to

promote accessibility of the built environment (Lao Country Paper 1997). This legislation, once in place, will provide a solid framework for the development of equal opportunities for people with disabilities in Lao PDR.

### **2.3 Ministerial responsibility**

At present, responsibility for disability-related policy and services lies with a number of government Ministries. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Department of Veteran's Affairs of MLSW, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education all have a role to play in meeting the varying and interlinked needs of disabled people.

Following the signature of the Proclamation of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, a National Committee for Disabled Persons (NCDP) was set up by the Government in 1995 to coordinate efforts to promote the full participation of disabled Laotians. This committee is chaired by a senior official of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and includes representatives of the Ministries of Public Health, Foreign Affairs and Education. While the committee was set up over two years ago, it has not been active to date. It is recognised that the committee needs to be revamped and expanded to include representation of disability issues at provincial and district levels, and of disabled persons, women, youth, and the trade union movement (Lao Country Paper 1997). Plans to establish an executive secretariat to support the NCDP are being prepared

### **2.4 Training Initiatives**

Training provision for disabled people in Lao PDR has been very limited to date. Some disabled people have received training and developed income generating activities through poverty alleviation and rural development programmes run by several NGOs (such as the Lao Women's Union) and international organizations (such as UNDP and UNICEF). Between 1993 and 1997, 1241 disabled people received training in a variety of skills areas, with most now running small enterprises as a result (see Appendix 2).

It is possible that some disabled people have received training in mainstream training and educational centres, but there is no readily available information on the number of people involved, and it was not possible in the course of this study to assess the extent of this.

Women within the Lao Disabled Persons Federation have established a sewing training centre for disabled women, which caters to a small number of women. Other than this, no dedicated training centre was identified during the study. It would appear that there are virtually no training programmes catering solely to disabled persons in Lao PDR.

## **2.5 Services for War Veterans**

There are approximately 10,000 war veterans in Lao PDR. The Government provides some services to disabled war veterans through the Department of War Veterans. The policy has been to establish government-run villages, where disabled ex-soldiers and their families live. These villages were originally the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence but now fall under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The services provided to these veterans include a monthly pension, on-going health care including the provision of prosthetic devices, and housing. Vocational training is not provided. Many of the people in these villages have skills, but need assistance if they are to set up income-generating activities. Others do not have skills but would like to train. In the course of the field visits undertaken during the ILO study, war veterans identified areas of vocational training and income generating activities which they would welcome, including weaving, wood carving, tailoring, food processing, fish culture and animal husbandry.

## **2.6 National Medical Rehabilitation Centre**

The National Medical Rehabilitation Centre (NMRC) was set up in 1964 under Ministry for Health, to provide physical rehabilitation services and supply prostheses. The centre also provides training to health professionals. It is reported that the centre has also been involved in the establishment of a village or villages for disabled civilians, similar to those set up for disabled war veterans. Since the introduction of the government decree on education for deaf and blind children in 1995, in the absence of any other service provider, the NMRC has run a school for children with these disabilities. The NMRC is also the focal point for NGOs providing prosthetic services.

A proposal to establish a vocational training centre at the NMRC has been recently developed and international funding was being sought at the time of the study. This proposal raises the issue of Ministerial responsibility: the NMRC currently falls under the Ministry of Public Health, while vocational training is the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. There was no indication in January 1998 of how this issue would be resolved.

## **2.7 Other disability-related services**

### **2.7.1 NGO Initiatives**

NGOs play an active role in assisting the Government to provide services to disabled people. Save the Children Fund (UK) has worked actively and effectively with the Ministry of Education to pilot test and support the integration of disabled children into primary schools. In 1997, SCF (UK) worked with 34 schools in the integrated education programme, following the completion of the pilot test in one school. By September 1998, the Ministry of Education aims to double the number of schools, to 70, located in 8 provinces. The immediate need to spread integrated education is recognized, as there were no opportunities in

the past, and education is the basis for employment opportunity. The pressing need to develop vocational training opportunities is also clear: the first group of disabled primary school children is now nearing completion of primary level education, and when they leave, there is nowhere for them to go to acquire vocational skills.

Other NGOs are involved in assisting the NMRC in the provision of prostheses and orthoses to those who become disabled due to UXO explosions (including POWER, World Vision), or in identifying the level of UXO contamination (Handicap International). POWER, World Vision and the NMRC, along with the Cambodian School for Prosthetics and Orthotics (CSPO) have recently formed an umbrella organization - COPE - to coordinate their work in this area.

### 2.7.2 Community-Based Rehabilitation

Community-based Rehabilitation (CBR) is a strategy within community development for the rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities and social integration of all people with disabilities. It aims to ensure that people with disabilities are able to maximise their physical and mental abilities, have access to regular services and opportunities, and achieve full integration within their communities and societies. It is a comprehensive approach which encompasses disability prevention and rehabilitation in primary health care activities, integration of disabled children in ordinary schools, and the provision of opportunities for gainful economic activities for disabled adults, (ILO, UNESCO, WHO 1994).

As part of the government public health programme, CBR was introduced in two provinces in 1993 (Lao Country Report 1997). 2598 people with disabilities benefitted from this service over the period 1993-1997. The focus of the service was primarily on medical rehabilitation, although there is the potential to expand the CBR programme to include vocational rehabilitation training, building on existing networks, using approaches which have been tried and tested in many countries of the Asian and Pacific region.

Several NGOs (World Vision, World Concern and Leprosy Mission International) have carried out CBR projects in the past and some are still involved. Project sites have included Savannakhet Province (World Vision), Saravane and Xiengkhuang Provinces (World Concern).

### 2.7.3 UXO Clearance

The Lao PDR Trust Fund for UXO was established by the Government in 1995 with assistance from UNDP and UNICEF, to finance a national programme of UXO awareness and clearance. A national coordinating committee - UXO Lao - has also been set up, and it is hoped that through the awareness raising and clearance activities, the incidence of new disabilities due to UXO explosions will decline. But while disability prevention campaigns - relating to UXO explosions

and other preventable impairments are of great value, services need to be developed to enable those who become disabled in this way to overcome the trauma involved, acquire new vocational skills, and generate an income.

### **2.8 Comment**

People with disabilities have limited access to training and employment-related services in Lao PDR. The absence of dedicated services is an obstacle for some disabled people, but many disabled people could take part in mainstream training courses, if a policy decision was taken to admit them and adequate preparation was made. Disabled people could be targeted along with other vulnerable groups in the poverty alleviation and rural development programmes underway and at the planning stage; and vocational training programmes to be set up in 4 centres could include disabled people in their target population. This approach could be fostered as a matter of government policy, mirroring the policy of inclusive education currently being implemented by the Ministry of Education. It would be an effective way of enabling disabled people to acquire marketable skills, and of promoting their integration into mainstream services, with minimum delay and at additional minimum cost.

## **3. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **3.1 Overview**

The situation of people with disabilities in Lao PDR needs to be viewed in the broader context of the country's 'least developed country' status, with its widespread poverty, low level of educational and skills training opportunities and limited health care provision.

Like many people, particularly in rural areas, most people with disabilities have had very little access to education and many are unable to read or write. Some have benefited from the development activities carried out by NGOs and international organizations (see Appendix 2) but relatively few have had vocational skills training and most rely on the support of their families or on subsistence level activities to generate an income.

The situation for children with disabilities is beginning to change, with the introduction of compulsory education in 1995 and the promotion of inclusive education by the Ministry of Education. The question of what these children will do when they leave school now needs to be tackled. Measures to provide vocational training of some kind are needed, in addition to measures to make further education available for those who require it.

The current vacuum in vocational training and employment-related services for disabled people should be tackled in a three-pronged approach, catering for the requirements of people with disabilities of working age, many of whom have had little or no education; the needs of disabled school-leavers; and the requirements

of disabled young people who have not had the opportunity to attend school. This three-pronged approach would involve the opening of mainstream vocational training institutions to disabled people, the specific targeting of disabled people in income-generation, micro-credit and other development programmes, and the establishment of special facilities for those who require additional support.

Assistance and support is required to enable them to generate an income or gain employment which will enable them to emerge from poverty and contribute to the country's development.

## **3.2 Recommendations**

### **3.2.1 Legislation**

To date, rehabilitation care, education and housing as well as tax exemptions for disabled people are covered by decrees. No comprehensive legislation is in place, although there are indications that human rights legislation is being planned. Vocational training and employment for disabled people are not currently covered in law. It is recommended that comprehensive legislation be introduced as soon as possible to underpin the rights of people with disabilities to equality of opportunity in training and employment, and in other related areas, along the lines proposed in ILO Convention 159 "Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons)", and in the Asian and Pacific Decade Mandates for Action.

### **3.2.2 National Committee on Disabled Persons**

The NCDP has been set up to act as the national focal point on disability matters and to advise the Government on policy, programmes and service provision relating to disability (see section 2). This committee has not been active, to date. Plans have been put forward to revitalise the NCDP and to make it more representative: these plans should be implemented as soon as possible. The reconstituted NCDP should, as a first priority, develop a coherent action programme to improve opportunities for people with disabilities, including targets to be achieved within specific time-frames.

### **3.2.3 Information**

Comprehensive, reliable information on the numbers of disabled people with different service needs throughout the country is essential, if the appropriate training and employment-support activities are to be planned and provided.

Recent, reliable information on the incidence of certain physical and sensory disabilities is available for most of the country (see 1.3). There is no information on the incidence of intellectual disabilities or mental health difficulties, though; the information on the prevalence of hearing and visual impairment is partial; and there is no comprehensive information on the number of women as distinct from men with disabilities.

It is recommended that the NCDP should arrange for a survey of the prevalence of intellectual disabilities, mental health difficulties, hearing and impairment to

be carried out, so that the dimensions of need, including the gender dimension, can be identified. It is also recommended that, where possible, existing statistics on disability be re-analysed to indicate the number of females as distinct from males with the disabilities in question.

#### 3.2.4 Integrated Training Opportunities - Formal

The Government of Lao PDR plans the development of four vocational training centres in different provinces over the period 1997-2003. The inclusion of people with disabilities from the outset in the training programmes provided in these centres would meet the vocational training needs of some school-leavers with disabilities and would also ensure that unskilled disabled people of working age have the opportunity to acquire formal skills, along with people from other disadvantaged groups. It is recommended that specific provision for disabled people be made in planning the training centres and in designing the training programmes.

#### 3.2.5 Integrated Training Opportunities - Informal

The Government of Lao PDR, in cooperation with several international organizations, and national and international NGOs, is involved in the implementation of programmes which aim to improve the well-being of vulnerable groups through the development of sustainable micro-finance in rural areas (United Nations Capital Development Fund - UNCDF), of income generating activities and training (UNDP/GTZ, UNICEF/Lao Women's Union) and proposing to introduce several others (such as the Rural Development Programme 1998-2002).

People with disabilities, while not specifically mentioned in the terms of reference of these programmes, make up a particularly vulnerable group in the population and should thus be eligible to be included in their activities. Some disabled people have already participated in training for income-generating activities organized under some of these programmes (see Appendix 2). It is recommended that the integration of disabled people into existing programmes be strengthened through the establishment of a Disability Resource Service (DRS), which would provide technical advice and individualised support required to increase the number of disabled people who benefit from these programmes. The DRS would provide advice on technical aids and adaptations required by individual disabled people, provide disability awareness sessions for programme staff, where required, and provide additional support to individual disabled people, where necessary, to ensure that they can successfully participate in programme activities. The DRS would also act as a disability information resource. It would have a strong mobile component, ensuring that its services were provided to activities in rural areas in different parts of the country as well as in urban centres. A proposal for this service should be developed by the ILO for discussion with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the National Committee on Disability, and international donor support should be sought.

### 3.2.6 Special training provision

Some disabled people may require additional support which would be best provided in a dedicated training facility. It is recommended that such a facility be developed on a pilot basis at the National Medical Rehabilitation Centre, for those disabled people who are not likely to benefit from the mainstream training and general development programmes discussed above. It is important that the training activities in this dedicated training centre be developed to meet identified labour market opportunities, and be provided in a flexible way to ensure that disabled people are successful in obtaining employment or in establishing viable small enterprises on completion of their training. It is recommended that a systematic approach be developed to the identification of labour market and income generation opportunities, and that the training courses prepare trainees to avail of these opportunities.

### 3.2.7 Public awareness/information

To be enabled to take their place in society and contribute to the national development effort, disabled people need to be informed about the options open to them. It is recommended that the NCDP should issue information leaflets on training, employment and income-generating opportunities to people with disabilities in cooperation with the Lao Disabled People's Organization. Many obstacles to the full participation of disabled people in society stem from the negative attitudes of the public at large, and of decision-makers in particular. It is also recommended that the NCDP should initiate and coordinate a campaign to raise awareness of the abilities and rights of disabled people in the public at large and specifically among employers and public sector decision-makers.

## **APPENDIX 1.**

### **Prevalence of certain disabilities\* by province, 1995**

Province	Population	Incidence of certain disabilities	Prevalence (per cent)
Vientiane	528109	1194	0.23
Mun	152820	913	0.60
Phongsaly	114519	1171	1.02
Luangnamtha	210820	1905	0.90

Oudomxay	113493	453	0.40
Bokeo	365333	2689	0.74
Luangprabang	246414	3374	1.37
Houaphan	291705	1309	0.45
Xayabury	200075	1258	0.63
Xiengkhuang	286089	1281	0.45
Vientiane Province	163847	1422	0.87
Borikhamxay	273779	1898	0.69
Khammuane	671581	3838	0.57
Savannakhet	256550	1535	0.60
Saravane	63836	890	1.39
Sekong	500994	2438	0.49
Champasack	87182	1055	1.21
Attapeu	54112	274	0.51
Xaysomboon			
Spec			
<b>Total</b>	<b>4581258</b>	<b>28897</b>	<b>0.63</b>

\* Amputations, foot deformities, total blindness, total deafness

Source: National Survey of Disabled Persons, POWER, 1996.

**APPENDIX 2.**

**Vocational Training and Employment for Disabled Persons through  
NGO, CBR and other internationally-funded programmes 1993-1997**

	<b>Trainee No.</b>			<b>Remarks</b>
	1993-94	1995-96	1997	
Hair cutting	3	7	5	Running their own activities, with income \$US 50-100 ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---" ---"
Beauty	6	0	0	
Tailoring	12	7	2	
Fishes breeding	12	1	0	
Poultry breeding	164	105	160	
Cows breeding	295	12	20	
Buffalo breeding	7	1	10	
Porks breeding	21	3	10	
Goats breeding	1	6	10	
Vegetable planting	5	105	120	
Bicycle repairing	4	2	3	
Training- Blacksmith	0	3	0	
Radio and T.V. Repairing	3	5	6	
Traditional massage	4	4	8	
School-teacher	9	2	1	
Workman in government sector	13	15	18	
Office staff- government	7	9	15	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>1241</b>

Reproduced from Lao Country Report, 1997

### **APPENDIX 3.**

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