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Vocational Training of Disabled Persons in Thailand: a Challenge to Policymakers

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VOCATIONAL TRAINING OF DISABLED PERSONS IN THAILAND

A CHALLENGE TO POLICYMAKERS

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FOREWORD

Vocational training provision and employment promotion for people with disabilities in Thailand is the responsibility of the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) of the Ministry of Labour and Public Welfare. In 1997, at the request of the DPW, the ILO East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team (EASMAT) carried out a study of the Thai Government policy and programme on vocational training for people with disabilities, in order to assess current provision in the light of the need for training among people with disabilities on the one hand and current labour market opportunities on the other.

The study examined programmes run by the Government and by some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in rural and urban areas as well as the vocational training component which several special schools include in their curricula. It focused on the training provided, from trainee admission to course completion, and on training outcomes, particularly in terms of employment and self-employment. The views of several employers on the skills and abilities of the disabled workers they recruit were also sought. Preliminary findings were discussed and feedback was obtained on tentative recommendation at a meeting with the Director General and senior staff of the Department of Public Welfare as the study neared completion.

As part of the study, a series of visits to training centres, schools, places of employment and other NGO facilities and other related visits was organised by officials of the Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (OCRDP) in the Ministry of Labour and Public Welfare. The visits provided useful insights into the structure, functions and operation of the training centres; the experience and viewpoints of employers; the views of the non-governmental service-providers; and the issues to be tackled in the process of linking the training more closely to the labour market opportunities locally and regionally. The study tour programme is outlined in Annex 1. Thanks are due to the OCRDP officials for making the tour both interesting and relevant to the aim of the study.

In Section 1, the current economic and social context is briefly described and situation of people with disabilities outlined, to set the context within which vocational training services are planned and delivered. Following this, in Section 2, the strengths and weaknesses of training provision are examined, conclusions are drawn and recommendations for further action are made.

The detailed study findings and recommendations are presented in annexes to this report. Annex 2 describes Thai Government policy on training and employment of people with disabilities and outlines the measures taken to promote employment. In Annex 3, vocational training services are described, their linkages to employment opportunities locally is considered and their outcomes in terms of employment and income-generating activities are examined. The role of the educational system in the process of skills training is touched on briefly, drawing on the examples of the special schools visited. Access

to mainstream vocational training centres is also discussed. The views of some employers on the skill level of disabled workers are presented.

ABBREVIATIONS

DPW Department of Public Welfare

DSD Department of Skills Development

EASMAT East Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team

ILO International Labour Organization

MOLSW Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

NGO Non-governmental Organization

NPHF National Public Health Foundation

NSO National Statistics Office

OCRDP Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Economic and Social Context

In the decade 1987-1996, Thailand experienced high economic growth, a significant increase in average incomes and a general improvement in living standards, reflected in a reduction in poverty, a rise in life expectancy and in the adult literacy rate, as well as increased access to health services. Along with these developments, employment was plentiful and the open unemployment rate low. The benefits of growth were not experienced equally by all, though, and in the same period, there was a widening of income disparities between individuals and groups of individuals within the population, between urban and rural areas, and in particular, between the Bangkok metropolitan area and the rest of the country. The costs of economic growth have also been reflected in a weakening of family ties, a development associated with the emergence of social problems which has particular significance for people with disabilities who generally rely on family support.

By mid-1996, the pace of economic growth had slowed down and from July 1997, with the floating of the Thai currency and its halving in value, an economic crisis gripped the country. The resulting economic difficulties have already had dramatic negative effects on employment and on living standards. Unemployment at the end of 1997 was officially estimated at 1.1 million people and is expected to increase by 400,000 or more during 1998; incomes of those in

employment have been reduced through reduction in hours worked, in regular pay and in bonuses; the prices of food, pharmaceuticals and other essential commodities have risen; and some public services have been reduced due to budgetary cutbacks (Royal Government of Thailand, 1998).

1.2 Situation of Disabled People

People with disabilities in Thailand have up to recently been largely excluded from opportunities central to participation in the social, economic, political and cultural life of the society. They have had limited access to education, skills training, health care and employment.

While the country as a whole experienced a dramatic increase in average living standards over the two decades, disabled people benefited little from the increased prosperity in terms of access to skills training. In 1980, there were two public training centres for disabled persons, catering to 172 disabled people. By 1990, the number of centres had risen to four, with a total capacity of 275 places. In 1997, seven centres had a capacity to train 960 disabled people and a further centre is planned, which will bring the total capacity to 1,160 by the end of 1998.

Besides the fact that vocational training opportunities are limited, many disabled people are excluded from training because they have no education. Even though special education programmes have existed in Thailand since 1939, school attendance rates of disabled children are extremely low - estimated at 3.08 per cent in 1995 (Poonpit, A. et al., 1995), with 6,617 pupils attending special schools and 2,047 in mainstream school programmes. This low participation rate is partly attributable to the fact that children with disabilities are exempt from compulsory education under the Primary Education Act of 1980 (Khanittha, 1997) and partly to the reported reluctance of mainstream schools to admit them. Given the lack of access to education, disabled children are often unable to read, write or perform basic arithmetic, which in turn makes then ineligible to enter most kinds of vocational training, and limits their chances of getting a job or starting self-employment.

So, while the incidence of poverty was declining throughout the country during the economic boom years, the continuing lack of access to education and skills training, in addition to the other barriers they face (inaccessible public buildings, inaccessible public transport and negative social attitudes), combined to ensure that most disabled people experience great difficulty in earning a living, often remaining dependent on their families or on society for their lifetimes, or subsisting on low, inadequate and uncertain incomes.

Since poverty, dependence and social exclusion are already commonplace among disabled people in Thailand, the question arises of whether and how the economic downturn will affect their situation. For some, the crisis may make little difference. For others, the impact of the downturn may be felt in several ways. The rise in unemployment and fall in recruitment may mean job losses for

those disabled people who are in employment and reduced job prospects for those who complete their training. For those who earn a living through self-employment, the economic downturn may be felt through reduced demand for their products and services, with implications for their income levels and possibly the survival of their enterprises. People with disabilities in need of training or seeking to start a small business may be affected by the reduction in Governmental expenditure, if current vocational training and employment promotion programmes are cut back and plans to expand opportunities put on hold. They may also suffer if they receive services from NGOs, whose capacity to provide these services to vulnerable groups has been reduced as a result of the decline in official support and private donations, following the crisis. For disabled people reliant on charity, who are already barely managing to survive, the economic downturn may hit hardest of all, as their benefactors feel the economic pinch.

1.3 Disability Statistics

Estimates of the number of disabled people in Thailand vary significantly. Studies carried out by the National Statistical Office (NSO) put the prevalence at approximately 1.8 per cent (1.1 million people) in 1991, and 1.7 per cent in 1996. These rates are considered to underestimate the incidence of disability, since the studies focused on people with severe disability and used a random sampling approach. In 1992/93, the National Public Health Foundation (NPHF) of the Ministry of Public Health carried out a more comprehensive survey of the Thai population aged over five years, based on medical check-ups, and identified 4.8 million disabled people. This figure, representing approximately 8.1 per cent of the population, is more in line with international estimates of disability prevalence than the NSO estimates, and is viewed as being a more reliable guide for policy makers (Sumvit, W., 1997).

The NPHF survey indicates that most disabled people (73 per cent) live in rural areas, with around a quarter (27 per cent) living in Bangkok (see Table 1.1). It also found a relatively low prevalence rate in the North-East and the highest prevalence in Bangkok.

Table 1.1 Disability prevalence and proportional distribution by region, 1991

Region	Prevalence (per thousand)	per cent distribution
North East	51.0	15.1

North	64.0	19.0
Central	65.0	19.3
South	67.0	19.9
Bangkok	90.0	26.7
Overall	80.82	
Number	4.8 million	

The most frequent disability type identified in the survey was physical or locomotor disability (57 per cent), followed by visual disability (20 per cent), intellectual disability (10 per cent), hearing impairment (6 per cent) and mental health disability (5 per cent).

Approximately 1.8 million people with disabilities (38 per cent) were in the age group 15 and 59 years, with around 1.1 million (23 per cent) aged under 15 and 1.9 million (39 per cent) aged 60 and over.

A gender breakdown of the NPHF survey data was not available. The NSO studies indicated that a ratio of males to females of between 1.6: 1 and 1.4:1. Applying these ratios to the NPHF results gives an estimated 1.85 - 2 million disabled women in the population, representing between 29 per cent and 37 per cent of the population of disabled people.

It is a matter of concern that the disability incidence rates identified in NPHF and NSO surveys vary so significantly. It is also of concern that the profiles of disabled persons produced by the different surveys differ in terms of disability type, regional prevalence and distribution, and age breakdown, and in some cases provide a completely reverse picture. Since this information is of central importance in decision-making and resource allocation, the underlying reasons for this variation should be investigated and a standard approach to defining disability and gathering data should be agreed.

SECTION 2. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This review of the Thai Government's vocational training programme for people with disabilities was carried out by the ILO EASMAT at the request of the Department of Public Welfare of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The aim was to assess current provision in the light of the need for training among people with disabilities on the one hand and current labour market opportunities on the other, within the framework of the targets set out in the National Plan for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons 1997 - 2001.

The review started with an examination of Government policy on vocational training and employment promotion for disabled persons and of the measures taken to implement this policy. Following this, it looked primarily at training courses offered by the Department of Public Welfare in special training centres, and included the programmes run by some NGOs and special schools for purposes of comparison. It also touched on the topic of access of disabled people to mainstream vocational training centres, although this aspect of public policy could not be thoroughly examined, in the time available.

2.1 Government Policy and Practice

The Thai Government's policy and programme for vocational training and employment promotion of disabled people is based on the conviction that, given the opportunity, most disabled people could acquire skills which would enable them to earn a living, contribute to the local and national economy, and take their place in society. This conviction is embedded in the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act of 1991, and recognised in the national planning process - most recently in the Eight National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997 - 2001) and the National Rehabilitation Plan for Disabled People, which complements it. The policy has been implemented through a range of different approaches, with varying degrees of success. The Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, and its Office are central in overseeing the implementation of the National Plan. A detailed overview is given in Annex 2.

2.2 DPW Training Centres

Training is provided for people with disabilities aged 17 to 40 in seven special centres run by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW) in different parts of the country. These training centres, which have a target capacity of 960 trainees, were attended by 810 trainees in November 1997 (84 per cent of capacity). Details of the DPW training provision are given in Annex 3, Section 3.2.

Training opportunities are limited and there is regional disparity in the availability of training opportunities. The North-East region, which is reported to have the lowest disability prevalence, has three DPW centres, while other regions are served by one centre. And, even though the opportunities are limited, several of the centres were operating under capacity, in that the actual trainee numbers were lower than the target number.

2.2.1 Admission policy

The DPW centres were reported to have an 'open door' admissions policy, in that virtually all applicants are given a place. But a comparison of the trainee profile with the profile of people with disabilities in Thailand overall, suggests that some 'self-selection' may be occurring among the target population. While people with disabilities who could benefit from training have a range of disabilities and generally have not attended school (see Sections 1.2 and 1.3), those attending

training in November 1997 predominantly had a physical disability, were male and had attended school for some time. Thus, there appears to be a mismatch between those who could benefit from training and those who actually benefit. People with intellectual disabilities in particular appear to be neglected, as are those who have not had formal education and are illiterate and innumerate. Women with disabilities are also underrepresented in the DPW centres overall, although not in all of the centres. The format of the courses may also contribute to the process of self-selection which appears to occur (see 2.2.3 below), as may the procedure for allocating trainees to courses within the centre, which is based on educational level and tested ability

2.2.2 Courses

Training is offered in 15 skill areas, usually involving semi-skilled manual or service activities. The courses were generally introduced on the basis of a decision taken by the Department of Public Welfare, although one or two courses have been established lately on the basis of locally-identified market opportunities. Many of the courses require trainees to have a level of formal education, and functional literacy and numeracy, while some do not. Most centres provide non-formal education to pupils with low levels of literacy and numeracy.

2.2.3 Format

The training courses are generally residential and of one year's duration.. Trainees are required to live at the centre for the duration of the course. It is possible that many do not apply for these courses, because they prefer to stay in their communities.

The fact that the courses are residential has significant cost implications.

In addition to the training in the centres, some on-job training was provided in a few cases. This form of training has been shown elsewhere to be an effective way of preparing disabled people for the modern workplace, and involves lower costs than centre-based training.

2.2.4 Standards

While courses of the same name are provided in several centres, there is no standard curriculum in place. The curriculum also differs from that in place in mainstream vocational training centres.

The lack of a standard curriculum is compounded by the fat that the level of the DPW training courses is relatively low, with the result that trainees may not be adequately prepared for work which they will be required to do in open employment. This point was made by one of the employers interviewed, who found that DPW centre graduates required more training than non-disabled job-seekers on recruitment.

2.2.5 Certification

On successful completion of the courses, trainees are awarded a certificate by the Department of Public Welfare. These certificates are not based on national standards, nor are they recognised by the Department of Skills Development, which is responsible for the certification of mainstream courses. While they may serve as a record of achievement for the individual graduate, their use in assisting trainees to get jobs is thus doubtful.

2.2.6 Trainee outcomes

When they leave the centre, some trainees get jobs in the skill areas in which they trained, others get jobs in other areas, others again are placed in work experience with employers, while others apply for loans to start a small business. Some trainees are said to 'go home', with no further details on their activities. While information on what trainees do on leaving is gathered by some centres, resources were not available to continue this afterwards. Thus, it is not possible to say what the longer term job retention rate is.

2.2.7 Constraints identified by centre staff

Lack of sufficient, adequately trained instructional staff, inadequate equipment and lack of finance are major constraints faced in the centres. Lack of a standard curriculum is a further constraint, along with the absence of a mechanism to link the courses offered to labour market opportunities locally, regionally and nationally.

2.2.8 Relevance to labour market opportunities

Concern with the relevance of training in special centres to labour market openings has been expressed, and there is a recognition that segregated training has not always equipped disabled people with the skills they need to obtain and retain a job, or to run a successful small enterprise.

One indication of the relevance of these training courses is the placement rate of course graduates to jobs involving the skills in which they trained. There was evidence that some trainees did enter such employment or self-employment on completion of their courses, but this was not available for all of the centres (see A3.2.9).

Another indication of the labour market relevance of the DPW training courses is given by the activities for which loans have been approved through the Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, as many DPW centre graduates apply for these loans when they leave. These activities these are generally in occupations which are not covered in the DPW training programmes - trading activities, agricultural activities and animal husbandry were frequent examples (See A2.4.2). Besides not preparing trainees for work in these areas, the DPW centres

do not offer training in the commercial and organizational skills required to start and develop a small business. Yet such training has been shown to be an important factor in ensuring success of these initiatives in other countries.

A further indication of the relevance of the DPW training courses can be drawn from experience with the quota scheme, which indicates a mismatch between the skills training provided and the opportunities available. Altogether, in 1997, over 15,000 jobs were designated for disabled people under the quota scheme, but only 31 per cent of these were filled. It is suggested that disabled job seekers do not have the skills required for these jobs. (See A2.4.2)

So there is scope for improving the market relevance of the courses provided by the centres. One way in which this might be done is to conduct a survey of labour market opportunities, locally, regionally and nationally, to determine the type of activities for which a market exists, the size of this market and the skills required. This information could form the basis of a review by the DPW of its current courses and decisions to introduce new courses. It could also indicate the optimal number of trainees in each skills course, by identifying the size of market demand for people with these skills. Another way in which the market relevance of the DPW training programme could be increased would be to examine the jobs available through the quota and to identify the skills required. The DPW could then develop new courses to fill these needs, on a temporary basis, if necessary.

2.3 NGO training programmes

Training is also provided by Non-Governmental Organizations in nine centres around the country. These centres receive some funding from the Thai Government, but generally rely on their own fund-raising efforts to finance their operations. (See A3.3).

The two NGO centres included in the study provided training courses in skills or high market relevance and reported high placement rates. The instructor/trainee ration in these centres was more favourable than in the DPW centres, and they both had sufficient, up-to- date training equipment.

Overall these NGOs were dynamic in their approach and ready to innovate if they saw the need. They were constrained, though, by the uncertainty of their funding arrangements.

2.4 Training in mainstream vocational training centres.

Mainstreaming is now promoted as a way of expanding vocational training opportunities for disabled people, and of promoting their integration into society. Some examples of mainstreaming were seen in the course of the study, although a complete overview was not possible. It would appear that attempts at mainstreaming are developed along different lines in different areas, rather than based on a nationally planned, adequately-resourced approach. (see A3.5).

If mainstreaming is to succeed, it is not sufficient simply to locate disabled trainees in a mainstream premises. Training and supports should be provided to the mainstream trainers, and advice provided on adaptations to premises and equipment which may be required. The DPW should take the initiative in developing a systematic training and support service, possibly in cooperation with an NGO. In doing this, the DPW could draw on the experience of an NGO visited in the course of the review which has developed a model of support to mainstreaming which is effective in supporting the integration of blind children into mainstream schools, and also into employment.

2.5 Training in special schools

While the DPW training centres catered predominantly to people with physical and locomotor disabilities, some vocational training for other disabilities groups is now provided in special schools under the Ministry of Education. One of the schools included in the study catered mainly to children with intellectual disability, and also to children with physical disability and visual impairment. This school had taken the initiative to admit non-disabled pupils recently, in a 'reverse integration' move. Another special school provided vocational training for deaf children. Both of these schools combined vocational training with the educational curriculum from a certain age onwards. They provided training in a range of activities, including agricultural activities and animal husbandry, as well as handicrafts and personal services. Many pupils started to work on leaving school, or went on to further training. (See A3.4).

This approach to vocational training provision for disabled people differs considerably from the approach used in the DPW centres, and is worthy of further study, especially since it caters to people with intellectual disability and hearing impairment, disabilities which are not represented among DPW centre trainees.

2.6 Recommendations

The review has illustrated the need for considerable changes to the Thai Government's vocational training programme for disabled people, if the targets set out in the National Plan 1997 - 2001 are to be achieved. One of the National Plan's main targets is the expansion of vocational rehabilitation services for disabled persons throughout the country to meet market demand on the one hand and individual training aspirations on the other. This will require action to reform existing training courses and introduce new courses linked to identified market opportunities and aimed at people with disabilities who are not currently benefiting from the training programme. Another aim is to promote inter-agency cooperation in the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. There appears to be huge potential in this, but decisive action is needed if this potential is to be realise. A third aim of the National Plan is to improve the information available to vocational rehabilitation service planners and providers. This should be given

high priority. A further aim is to provide staff development courses for those involved in service provision. This is a key element in the proposed changes.

2.6.1 Restructuring existing courses

If this is to be achieved, existing training courses should be reviewed in terms of their relevance to employment and self-employment opportunities, as outlined above; course curricula should be standardized and up-graded to ensure that they reflect what workers will be required to do in the workplace; and greater investment made in training equipment. The ILO could provide technical assistance and advice to the Department of Public Welfare in this process.

In revising the vocational training programme, the model of on-job training could also be explored. This approach has proved to be successful in preparing disabled people for work in an open employment setting, especially where they have an intellectual disability. It has also proved to be a lower cost option than centre-based training, and has the advantage that the training equipment is provided by the company. In some cases, this type of training is provided by the employer. More frequently, it is provided as part of a supported employment placement, where a job coach from a specialist agency provides the training in the workplace.

2.6.2. Meeting the backlog of need

It is clear from the review that many disabled people are prevented by their lack of education from participating in current training courses. Until people with disabilities have better educational access, the DPW should provide courses which will cater to those who have little or no formal education. While some courses offered do not require trainees to have attended school, far more such courses are required to meet the present backlog of training requirements.

These courses could be designed in an innovative manner, to prepare people for opportunities identified through the labour market survey (see 2.2.8).They could be short-term courses, perhaps delivered at local level, rather than requiring trainees to attend a regional centre for the duration of the course. A mobile training unit which serves different provinces in a region, might be considered. If training is delivered at local level, this may help to overcome a second problem which arises at times when disabled people attend a residential centre far from their homes- the problem of people not being able to fit back into their local communities after having spent a year away. The cost of training delivered in this format is likely to be lower than that involved in the current, residential centre-based approach.

The Department of Public Welfare should undertake a series of pilot projects to develop and test ways of providing training to people with disabilities who are no benefiting from existing opportunities. One pilot project could be initiated to integrate disabled people into the training programmes currently provided for young women at village level in some regions of the country. Preparation for this

project should include the systematic training of trainers to provide training to disabled people, adapting the course content and equipment if necessary. It is proposed that ILO provide assistance and advice to the Department, and in particular to the Occupational Assistance Division within the Department, in this pilot project, and others which might be developed.

2.6.3. Support to small businesses

People with disabilities who wish to enter self-employment or start a small business may apply for loans from a fund administered by the Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. Many applicants to date have completed a training course in one of the Government training centres. No training or on-going supports are available, though, to enhance the viability of the self-employment and small business initiatives funded. The lack of such training and support undoubtedly limits the sustainability of the initiatives and the effectiveness of the fund.

It is proposed that the ILO assist the Department of Public Welfare to provide training and support for disabled entrepreneurs by:

- arranging from the translation into Thai of the ILO Start Your Business and Improve Your Business training modules and related training materials, and

- providing training for trainers in these modules.

2.6.4. Pilot training and employment resource centre

Experience internationally indicates the effectiveness of on-job training in preparing people with disabilities for employment. It is often provided as part of a service which provides on-going support to the employment of disabled people, in a structured, systematic way. Where such a service exists, higher placement and retention rates of disabled employees have been reported. In Thailand at present, on-job training is provided on a limited basis and the job placement service for disabled people in the DPW focuses primarily on the recruitment stage, with limited follow-up after placement.

A training and employment resource service which both promotes and supports the on-job training and employment of disabled people in Thailand would complement the existing service and is likely to lead to better results. This service could also provide the support required by mainstream training centres if they are to be enabled to effectively integrate people with disabilities into their courses. Rather than being solely involved in direct training provision, in a way which is constrained by lack of resources, the DPW could allocate some of its resources to the development, on a pilot basis, of a regional resource centre to provide such a service, with the aim of improving training and employment

opportunities for disabled persons. It is proposed that the ILO provide technical assistance and support to the DPW in this pilot project.

2.6.5 Cooperation with NGOs

Support to NGOs is currently provided by the Government in the form of grants from the Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. This is provided on an annual basis and is not guaranteed from year to year, with the result that the NGOs face considerable uncertainty, and constrained in their ability to plan ahead and obliged to devote considerable resources to fund-raising. Given the valuable and at times innovative work which is currently being done by NGOs in providing training to disability groups not served through the DPW centres, the DPW should channel more support to their activities and promote greater co-operation between NGOs and DPW centres in its work to make the vocational training programme for disabled people more comprehensive and effective.

2.6.6 Staff Development

The lack of qualified instructional staff is a major constraint in the current vocational training programme for disabled persons. If the reforms suggested here are to have an impact, it is essential that high priority be given to providing refresher training to existing instructors in their skill areas and also in training methodology. Training in methods of instruction is also essential to the success of training in other formats - such as short-term training delivered at local level, or on-job training.

In addition to training for instructors, particular attention should be given to training for managers of DPW centres. These managers will be central in overseeing the proposed reforms and in developing new approaches to ensure that the training for disabled people enables them to earn a living when they graduate. Investment in the development of their managerial and project management capacities will help ensure that any reforms undertaken will be successfully implemented.

2.6.7 Information Systems

Comprehensive, reliable information on the prevalence of disability is a basic requirement for equitable planning and provision of vocational training for disabled people in Thailand. In addition, systematic information on the outcomes of training and on labour market opportunities are important tools in helping policy makers and service managers ensure that the training provided meets labour market requirements.

Information currently available on these matters is inadequate. Statistics on disability prevalence from various sources give a significantly different, and sometimes mutually-contradictory profile. Information on trainee outcomes is, on the whole, unsystematic and incomplete, while there was no evidence that

information on labour market opportunities and trends is gathered to inform decisions on training provision.

The Department of Public Welfare should give high priority to developing adequate information systems, so that services can be planned and delivered for disabled people equitably, on the basis of identified needs.

Concluding Comment

Steps have been taken in the past decade to improve opportunities for people with disabilities in Thailand. The Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act was introduced in 1991 to underpin and strengthen Government policy and vocational training services were expanded, while measures to promote employment were introduced. Despite the improvement in services, though, it is clear that the policy measures need to be fine-tuned and made more effective.

The Vocational Training Programme for disabled people in Thailand is limited in the extent to which it prepares disabled people for employment or self-employment. Attempting to expand the existing network of DPW centres will not help overcome the problems which need to be tackled. Innovation is needed in the approach to course design, which needs to be brought much closer to the requirements of the labour market. In doing this, it is essential that the training requirements of the majority of disabled people, who have not attended school, should be given high priority. Innovation is needed in the format of training provision: in addition to centre-based training at regional level, there is a need for village level courses and perhaps mobile training units to deliver training at grassroots level. Training is required for instructional staff and for training service managers, and investment in up-to-date training equipment is urgently required. Innovation is also required in the way in which the DPW works with other agencies - there is much to be gained from contracting some of the necessary services to NGOs which have shown themselves to be dynamic and innovative in their approach to service provision for disabled people.

It is hoped that the Government will take advantage of the current period of reflection arising from the economic crisis to streamline vocational training for disabled people and to ensure that the services provided are more relevant to current labour market and self-employment opportunities. It is also hoped that the vocational training programme can be opened up to reach disabled people who could benefit from training but are unable to do so at present.

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ANNEX 1. Study Programme

This study was carried out by the ILO/EASMAT, in cooperation with the ILO Bangkok Area Office, at the request of the Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, Department of Public Welfare at the Ministry of Labour and Public Welfare

A staff member was assigned by the Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons to arrange, coordinate and participate in the study visits, as well as providing any other support required. In addition to the resource person from the Office, several other members of the Office staff took part in the visits and members of the vocational training centre staff also joined the delegation at each location.

Methodology

Following a review of existing information on the vocational training and employment situation of disabled people in Thailand, visits were arranged to nine vocational training centres, run by the Department of Public Welfare and by non-governmental organisations. Discussion were held with vocational training centre managers and staff, focusing on the programme design and course content; the admission and course-allocation procedures; the centres' linkages with local employers; trainee outcomes, and in particular, the placement rate of trainees and the relevance of their skill training to the jobs obtained;; the constraints faced by the training centres and the disabled people in relation to training and employment; and the areas in which improvements could be made.

The study tour also included visits to three special schools which provide elements of vocational training in their curricula were visited, including one for deaf children, one for blind children and one for children with different disabilities. A resource centre which provides support to the inclusion of blind people into mainstream schools and employment provided an interesting illustration of how the integration of people with disabilities into mainstream education and employment can be effectively supported. One mainstream skills development centre was also included in the study tour. The opinions of a number of employers who have employed disabled workers under the quota scheme were sought, on the adequacy of their vocational training skills and further training requirements.

Following the study tour, a meeting was held with the Director General of the Public Welfare Department, and members of his senior staff, to present the tentative conclusions of the study and obtain feedback

Study Tour Programme

Vocational Training Centres - Department of Public Welfare	· The Fifth Anniversary of the Queen Social Welfare Centre, Lopburi
	· Phrapadaeng Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, Samut Prakan Province
	· North Eastern Rehabilitation Home for the Disabled
	· Thongpoon Phaopanat Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, Muang District, Ubon Ratchathani Province
	· Vocational Training Centre, Khon Kaen Province
	· Yard Fon Vocational Rehabilitation Centre, Chiangmai
Vocational Training Centres - NGOs	· Foundation for the Employment Promotion of the Blind
	· Redemptorist Vocational School, Pattaya
	· Mahatai Foundation, Cholburi
	· McKean Institute, Chiang Mai
Places of Employment	· PAN Enterprises, Ayuddhaya
	· Baan Wiboonsee
	· Radio and Electrical Repair shops employing disabled people
	· Export factory employing disabled people

Other facilities	· Ubon Skills Development Institute
	· Foundation for the Deaf, Chiang Mai
	· Ubon Panyanokoon School, Ubon
	· School for the Blind, Pattaya
	· Christian Foundation for the Blind, Khon Kaen

Time frame

The literature review took place during the period April - June 1997. The study visits and interviews took place between November and December 1997.

Funding

The study was co-funded by the Department of Public Welfare and the ILO (EASMAT and the Area Office, Bangkok).

ANNEX 2. Government Policy and Practice

The Thai Government's policy and programme for vocational training and employment promotion of disabled people is based on the conviction that, given the opportunity, most disabled people could acquire skills which would enable them to earn a living, contribute to the local and national economy, and take their place in society. This conviction is embedded in legislation and recognised in the national planning process - most recently in the Eight National Economic and Social Development Plan (1997 - 2001) and the National Rehabilitation Plan for Disabled People, which complements it. The policy has been implemented through a range of different approaches, with varying degrees of success.

A2.1 Legislation

In 1991, fifty years after the initial establishment of state welfare services for people with disabilities in Thailand, the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act B.E.2534 was introduced to underpin the government's disability policy. This law sets out to improve opportunities for disabled persons to participate in society through concrete measures to promote their integration, and to protect their rights, including the right to appropriate and adequate rehabilitation services, and to assistance from public and private sector agencies to solve their economic and social problems, and to promote their self-reliance.

A2.2 Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons

The Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, established under the Rehabilitation Act, comprises representatives of different ministries (Labour and Public Welfare, Public Health, Education, University Affairs, Budget Bureau, Department of Medical Services) and six NGO representatives. This broad composition reflects the multi-dimensional nature of the task of improving opportunities for disabled people, and the need for action across a range of different policy areas if equality of opportunity is to be achieved. The Committee, which is chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, has policy and planning advisory roles concerning the implementation of the Rehabilitation Act. In relation to vocational training and employment, it provides assistance in the development and rehabilitation of disabled persons, and supports disability-related services of public and non-governmental organisations by providing appropriate technical and financial assistance, facilities or services. In addition, the Committee approves programme and project applications for loans or grants from the Fund for Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.

A2.2.1 Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons

The Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (OCRDP), also set up under the Rehabilitation Act, has wide-ranging functions, including the following of relevance to vocational training and employment:

- coordination of and cooperation with rehabilitation service providers
- collection and retrieval of information on people with disabilities, disability prevention, and related matters
- preparation of rehabilitation programmes for submission to the Committee
- training of personnel
- employment promotion
- monitoring and follow-up of rehabilitation services.

People with disabilities who register with the OCRDP have the right to vocational guidance and training, as well as to education either in special schools or in ordinary schools.

A2.3 National Rehabilitation Plan for Disabled Persons 1997-2001

The National Rehabilitation Plan 1997-2001, drawn up by the OCRDP in consultation with relevant government and non-governmental agencies, aims to enable people with disabilities to earn their own living, live independently and participate in society as far as possible. It complements the Eight National Economic and Social Development Plan in providing policy guidelines on occupational rehabilitation as well as medical, educational and social rehabilitation. It envisages the expansion of vocational rehabilitation services for disabled persons throughout the country to meet market demand on the one hand and individual training aspirations on the other. A two-pronged approach to training provision is proposed - training in special centres catering to disabled

people, which has been the traditional approach to date, and training in mainstream training centres catering to non-disabled people, which is a new development. Vocational counselling and guidance services are made available to those who require assistance. The plan also aims to promote inter-agency cooperation in the provision of vocational training services for persons with disabilities in order to increase their employment opportunities; to improve and upgrade technical and information systems involved in supporting occupational rehabilitation programmes for disabled people; and to provide staff development opportunities.

The National Plan recognises that the provision of vocational training, alone, will not result in improved employment opportunities for disabled people unless changes occur in a range of areas. A major obstacle which prevents many disabled people from acquiring a skill and getting work is their lack of education. The plan therefore sets out to secure improved access to and opportunity in education for all disabled people. Employer attitudes to disabled job seekers are often negative, and to overcome this barrier to employment, the plan provides for campaigns to promote job opportunities for disabled persons. And, even if they acquire a skill, disabled persons may be prevented from holding down a job if they are unable to get into and around places of work, or unable to travel to and from the workplace. Thus, the plan sets the target of improving the accessibility of public buildings and public transport. Once again, the approach taken is based on the understanding that improving opportunities for people with disabilities is a multi-dimensional task requiring cooperation and collaboration between different sectors of Government, if progress is to be made.

A2. 4 Policy Implementation

A2.4.1 Vocational Training

Vocational training is currently provided in seven centres run by the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), and a further nine centres by non-governmental organizations. These centres, which are located in different parts of the country, cater only to disabled people and generally provide one-year, residential courses. Current provision in the DPW training centres is outlined in Section 3 below, and examples of NGO training provision are given for purposes of comparison.

Some special schools for disabled children under the Ministry of Education also provide vocational training from a certain level onwards. Examples of such training are also given in the following section.

In addition to training in special centres, mainstream training centres are officially encouraged to admit people with disabilities to their training courses. Progress in promoting attendance of disabled people in mainstream training centres is discussed briefly in Annex 3.

A2.4.2 Employment Promotion

Recent measures to promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities include a quota scheme, employer incentives, a job placement service, a fund to promote self-employment initiatives, and a sheltered workshop established to provide employment for trainees completing vocational training courses.

In addition to these measures, the National Rehabilitation Plan for Disabled Persons includes the target of launching campaigns on appropriate job opportunities for disabled persons, and of promoting inter-agency cooperation on occupational rehabilitation services for disabled persons, so as to increase their employment opportunities.

Quota scheme

The 1991 Rehabilitation Act provides for a quota scheme, which was introduced by Ministerial Regulation in 1994. Under this scheme, private companies employing over 200 employees are obliged to employ one disabled person for the first 200 employees and to supply 1 percent of the jobs to people for every 100 employees after this. Exemption is allowed where employers cannot identify work suitable to disabled persons and have received approval from the Department of Public Welfare. If employers do not fulfil their quota obligation, they are requested to pay a specified contribution to the Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.

The quota scheme does not currently apply to public sector employment. This feature of the scheme has been the subject of considerable debate. It is argued that private sector employers would be more likely to fulfil their quota obligations if the public sector gave the lead. While the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons has officially requested the Civil Service Commission to change current government regulations, which currently stand in the way of government implementation of the quota, this has not yet been done and the Government has not yet agreed to amend the quota regulation to include the public service. Some progress has been made, though, in the form of a Cabinet Resolution in April 1997 which stated that people with disabilities may be recruited by government agencies and state enterprises. The Office of the Civil Service Commission has informed all government agencies that people with disabilities who are capable of performing certain duties may compete in examinations for the seats of government agencies, and the Office of the State Enterprise Relations Commission has informed all state enterprises to recruit disabled persons who are qualified for the available jobs.

Compliance with the quota is purely voluntary, as the scheme does not have an enforcement mechanism. This is reflected in its low implementation rate. In 1996, only 40 of the 5415 employers with an obligation to employ disabled people under the quota actually met this obligation, either by providing a job or by paying a contribution to the Rehabilitation Fund, while 60 per cent of eligible employers failed to meet their quota obligation in any way. Less than a third (31 per cent) of the 15,063 designated jobs under the quota were filled by disabled job seekers.

There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the skills of disabled job seekers do not match the requirements of the jobs designated under the quota, and that this skill mismatch contributes to the non-fulfilment of the employment quota. This point has implications for the vocational training programmes for disabled people, and will be discussed further in Section 4.

Tax Incentives

The Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act provides for two types of tax incentive to encourage the recruitment of disabled workers. Employers of disabled people are entitled to tax deductions relating to the wages paid to disabled persons, equivalent to twice the amount of the wages paid. And owners of buildings, sites or vehicles, or service providers any of whom provides equipment directly to facilitate disabled persons is entitled to tax deductions equivalent to twice the amount of the expenses incurred. No information was readily available on the extent to which these incentives were used or on their effectiveness in promoting employment.

Job Placement Service

The OCRDP provides a small-scale job placement service for disabled persons based in Bangkok. Because of its limited resources, this service focuses predominantly on providing information on job vacancies from a central location to job seekers and training centres, and does not play a proactive role in securing employment or in following up after recruitment to promote job retention.

The Department of Skills Development within the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare also provides a job placement service for disabled persons. A division of employment promotion for disabled persons has been set up, and officials have been assigned to provide job placement services at different district offices, to all job seekers, including people with disabilities.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that relatively few disabled job seekers apply to the job placement service in their search for jobs. In 1996, only 657 people with disabilities applied for jobs through the service, and 457 positions were found (70 per cent of cases).

Vocational Training Centres of the Public Welfare Department and those run by NGOs also seek jobs for graduates from their centres, relying primarily on arrangements which exist with specific companies locally and regionally, and on the information provided by the placement service.

Promotion of Self Employment

A Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons was established under the 1991 Rehabilitation Act. This fund is made up of government grants, employer payments linked to non-fulfilment of quota obligations, private donations and

other income. One of its purposes is to provide revolving capital for expenses incurred in the implementation and provision of assistance to disabled persons.

Disabled people who wish to establish their own business may apply for a loan from the fund amounting to a maximum of 20,000 Baht, repayable without interest over a five-year period. By the end of 1997, 5373 people with disabilities had received loans from the fund. The qualify for the loan scheme, the applicant must be registered with the OCRDP, and that the proposed activity be considered viable.

The loans from the Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons in the first five years of its operation were most frequently given for trading activities. 45 per cent of loan approvals involved this type of activity, and mainly in the sale of lottery tickets. Other trade-related loans were given for the establishment of grocery or fresh fruit businesses or for a range of other small trading businesses (see Table A2.1). Over a third of the loans (34 per cent) were given for agricultural enterprises - particularly in pig raising, poultry or cattle rearing. Approximately a fifth of the loans (21 per cent) were provided to fund self-employment initiatives including dress-making, machine repair, repair of electrical appliances, joss-stick making, hairdressing and a range of other activities.

Table A2.1 Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons - Loan Approvals to December 1997

Type of Activity		% of loans	
Trading			45
	Lottery tickets	22	
	Grocery	11	
	Fresh fruit, onions and garlic	6	
	Clothes, accessories	3	
	Other	3	
Agriculture			34
	Pig rearing	11	

	Poultry	8	
	Plantation - rice and crops	7	
	Cattle raising	5	
	Fish	2	
	Other	1	
Employment			21
	Dress-making	4	
	Machine repair	4	
	Electrical appliance repair	3	
	Joss stick making	3	
	Hairdressing	2	
	Word processing	1	
	Other	4	
Total = 5373			**100**

Source: Information supplied by OCRDP.

People with physical disabilities have been the main beneficiaries of the fund to date, receiving four in five of the loans (80 per cent). One in seven of the loans (14 per cent) were granted to people with visual impairment, while 4 per cent went to people with hearing impairment. People with intellectual or mental health disabilities made up 2 per cent of the beneficiaries.

Information on the gender breakdown of loan approvals was not readily available, so it is not possible to gauge the extent to which women with disabilities have benefited from the loans, compared to disabled men.

Activities for which loans were approved are deemed viable, since they have been approved by officials involved in the loan application process and have been

sufficiently remunerative to enable beneficiaries to make repayments. The activities identified by the disabled applicants must therefore be seen as reflecting labour market opportunities in their localities. The question of how the vocational training system prepares disabled people to undertake these activities will be addressed in Section 4.

Sheltered workshop

The Vocational Development Centre, a sheltered workshop, was established in Pak Ket to provide employment for disabled people who completed training in the Public Welfare and NGO centres. This centre operates a sewing workshop producing ready-made clothes. Its stated aim is to enhance the skills and experience of disabled people and to familiarise them with the requirements of the working environment, before they enter the open labour market. Disabled workers are paid on a productivity basis and are provided with accommodation and food at minimal charge. In 1992, 57 workers were employed in this centre.

Campaign to promote job opportunities

The National Rehabilitation Plan includes provision for a campaign to promote job opportunities for disabled persons, and of promoting inter-agency cooperation on occupational rehabilitation services for disabled persons, so as to increase their employment opportunities. No systematic information on action to implement these aims was gathered in the course of the study. It would appear from anecdotal evidence, though, that limited resources have been devoted to this effort to date, and that there is scope for more effective action.

A2.5 Comment

Steps have been taken in the past decade to improve opportunities for people with disabilities in Thailand. The Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act was introduced in 1991 to underpin and strengthen Government policy, vocational training services were expanded and employment promotion measures were introduced. Despite the improvement in services, though, it is clear that the policy measures could be fine-tuned and made more effective. In some cases, further Government action would be required (such as in the case of the quota legislation). In others, an increase in resources allocated to this area would be necessary (for example, to expand vocational training opportunities). But much can be achieved if the Government makes use of the period of reflection brought about by the current economic crisis, to reallocate existing resources so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing services and to experiment with innovative ways of preparing disabled people for labour market participation.

ANNEX 3. Vocational Training for Disabled People

This section examines the Thai Government's vocational training policy and programme for people with disabilities. The overview is based on a review of relevant documents, and on information gathered during a tour of vocational training facilities, specialist schools, NGO facilities, workplaces and discussions with the vocational training centre managers, NGO directors, employers and government officials (see Annex 1).

A3.1 Vocational Training Policy

Government policy on vocational training for people with disabilities has in the past concentrated on the provision of training courses in special centres, catering to disabled people only. In recent years, this approach has been complemented with an emphasis on promoting opportunities for disabled people in mainstream training centres. Overall, it is recognised that existing training capacity is insufficient to cater to the need, and apart from promoting access of disabled people to mainstream centres, the National Rehabilitation Plan for Disabled People 1997-2000 envisages the expansion of special vocational rehabilitation services for disabled persons throughout the country. It is also recognised that the training programme needs to be brought more into line with market demand on the one hand and individual training aspirations on the other. In addition, the National Rehabilitation Plan aims to promote inter-agency cooperation in the provision of vocational training services for persons with disabilities, and sets out to improve and upgrade technical and information systems of relevance to these services, as well as developing staff working in such programmes.

The Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, through its Office, holds responsibility for the coordination of vocational and other disability-related services provided by governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Financial support for institutions providing vocational training to disabled people is available from the Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, set up under the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act.

A3.2 Public Vocational Training Centres

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) runs seven training centres for disabled people, in Chiang Mai, Khon Kaen, Ubon Ratchathani, Samut Prakan, Nakon Sri Thammarat, Lopburi provinces. These special centres serve regional catchment areas comprising between six and twenty provinces. With the exception of the North-Eastern region which has three DPW training centres, the regions are each served by one centre. The seven centres have a target to train 960 trainees at one time (information supplied by OCRDP). An eighth centre is scheduled to open in Nongkhai province in 1998, with a target to train 200 disabled people, and plans are underway for a further two centres. The ratio of current targeted trainee places to the population of disabled people aged 15 - 59 in each region varies from 1:549 in the North-East to 1:3604 in the Southern region, with an overall ratio of 1:1,895.. While underestimating planned

provision, the ratios shown in Table A3.1 give a rough indication of the planned level of provision, and particularly of the regional disparities in this. It is noteworthy that the North-Eastern region, which was found to have the lowest disability prevalence rate (NPHF, 1993), has the highest training capacity, while other regions with higher prevalence rates are less well served (see Tables 1.1 and A3.1). The high level of provision in the North-East may be linked to the findings of the NSO surveys of disability which gave a significantly different regional breakdown of disability prevalence.

Table A3.1. Planned training provision and population of disabled people, by region

Region	People with Disabilities (NPHF) (a)	PWD aged 15 - 59 (b) (Estimate)	Target Trainee (c) No.	Ratio of (c) to (b)
North-East	728,678	274,712	500	1:549
North	916,879	345,663	100	1:3,457
Central	931,356	351,121	100	1:3,511
South	960,310	362,037	100	1:3,604
Bangkok Metropolis and Vicinity	1,288,457	485,748	160	1:3,036
Total		1,819,281		1:1,895

Six of the DPW centres were visited in the course of the study, and most of the following discussion refers to these centres only. Where possible, though, information is presented for all seven centres.

A3.2.1 Admission policy

The DPW centres have ‘open door’ policies in that all applicants admitted, on the condition that they have no communicable disease, can live independently and are aged 17 - 40. Only one centre reported a recent decision not to admit an applicant - in this case, a person with an intellectual disability. Otherwise, all those who apply are admitted to the centre, attend free of charge and are provided with food and lodging for the duration of the course.

In many cases, applicants apply directly to the centre, having heard about the programme either through the public welfare office at provincial level, through announcements in the media (local radio) or though personal networks.

A3.2.2 Training Courses.

In the seven Department of Public Welfare training centres, courses are offered in fifteen skill areas (see Table A3.2). Most of these skill training courses were decided on and designed centrally by the Department of Public Welfare - dressmaking, handicrafts and lacquerware making, leatherware, sewing, typing and computer courses, repair of electrical appliances, television, radio, motor cycle and small engine and hairdressing. Three centres have developed extra courses in response to locally identified market opportunities or trainee aspirations, including welding, silk framing, shoe repair, and mosquito net manufacture. In one centre, the new course was developed following consultations with an organization of disabled people locally. Another centre reported that employers were consulted on the curriculum content of a proposed course. One centre reported that it has a committee which decides on curricular offer. One of the centres also manufactures prosthetics and orthotics, in connection with the provision of a physical rehabilitation service.

Table A3.2 Department of Public Welfare Vocational Training Courses, 1997

Courses	No. of centres
Dressmaking	5
Handicrafts and lacquerware/Neilloware	2
Typing and computer	3
Electrician	5
Beautification/Barber	5
Radio and Television repair	4
Motor cycle and small engine repair	3
Leather making	2
Prosthetics and Orthotics	1

Welding	1
Massage	1
Silk picture framing	1
Mosquito net manufacture	1
Shoe repair	1
Industrial sewing	1

Source: Information supplied by OCRDP

While courses of the same name are offered in the different DPW centres, there is no standard curriculum for these courses. The course content is specific to each training centre and differs from the curricula of courses of the same name in mainstream vocational training centres. The need to standardise the course content is recognised, as is the need to upgrade it. One centre was in the process of upgrading one of its courses in consultation with the local skills development centre in December 1997.

The training centres do not provide any training in agricultural or horticultural activities, or animal husbandry, although most of the trainees live in rural areas and this is the type of activity in which opportunities are available.

Several centres reported that some of their trainees attended mainstream vocational training centres in the area. In one case, 14 trainees were attending a skills development centre, as a separate group taking a special course, rather than attending a course alongside non-disabled trainees. In another case, 36 trainees attended a vocational training centre for advanced training in industrial sewing machine operation. In a third case, three trainees had opted to attend a nearby mainstream centre.

Most of the centres provide non-formal education classes for trainees who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills. These courses are supported by the Department of Non-Formal Education of the Ministry of Education.

A3.2.3 Allocation to courses

While an overall ‘open door’ policy applies in the DPW centres, admission to specific courses depends on educational level and tested ability (literacy and numeracy). Thus, for example, a specified educational standard and a tested level of literacy and numeracy is required for entry to word processing, electrical appliance and electronic equipment repair courses. If an applicant for these

courses does not meet the entry criteria, he or she is allocated a place on another course, such as dress-making, beautician or barber training.

A3.2.4 Trainee profile

In November 1997, 810 trainees were attending the seven DPW training centres, representing 84 per cent of theses centres' planned capacity (960 trainees). The centres varied in size - from 66 trainees in the smallest centre to 200 in the largest. Some of the centres had more trainees than were originally planned, while others had significantly fewer - in one centre, trainees in attendance represented 46 per cent of the planned training capacity (see Table A3.3).

Table A3.3 Target trainees and trainee numbers, December 1997

	Target trainees	**Current Trainees**	**Current trainees as % of target trainees**
DPW 1: Lopburi	100	148	148
DPW 2: Samut Prakan	160	115	72
DPW 3: Ubon Ratchathani	100	72	72
DPW 4: Ubon Ratchathani	250	114	46
DPW 5: Khon Kaen	150	200	133
DPW 6: Chiang Mai	100	95	95
DPW 7: Nakhon Sri Thammarat	100	66	66
Total DPW			**84**

Looking at the ratio of current trainees to the population of disabled people aged 15-59 in each region, the actual provision level is seen to be lower than the planned level (see Tables A3.4 and A3.1). It should be borne in mind again, though, that these figures give a better indication of the regional disparities in provision than of the absolute levels, since they are calculated on the basis of the population aged 15 - 59, rather than 17 - 40.

Table A3.4 Current training provision and population of disabled people, by region (Dec. '97)

Region	People with Disabilities 15-59 (NPHF) (a)	Current Trainees (b)	Ratio of (b) to (a)
North-East	274,712	386	1:712
North	345,663	95	1:3,639
Central	351,121	148	1:2,372
South	362,037	66	1:5,485
Bangkok Metropolis and Vicinity	485,748	115	1:4,224
Total	1,819,281		1:2,246

Disability type

People with physical disabilities made up the vast majority of trainees. A small proportion had sensory disabilities (mainly deafness, but in some case blindness). Only one centre had a mix of disabilities among its trainees. This profile stands in contrast to the overall profile of disability types in the population, which found that people with physical and locomotor disabilities make up slightly over half (57 per cent) of the population of disabled people (NPHF, 1992).

Gender balance

The majority of trainees were male, with one in five being female. The proportion of female trainees varied considerably between the DPW centres: one centre had an almost equal gender balance while another catered exclusively to male trainees (see Table A3.5). Since women with disabilities are estimated to comprise between 29 per cent and 37 per cent of the population of disabled people in Thailand, they are clearly underrepresented in the training centres.

It is unclear why there are relatively so few female trainees in some centres. It is likely that the low attendance in these centres has something to do with the centre's policy. One of the centres catered exclusively to males. Another centre which carried out a publicity campaign recently reported a dramatic increase in the number of female applicants (from 19 in 1996 to 42 in 1997), but was constrained by its limited living accommodation for women (it had

accommodation for 30 women, but there are 42 attending). In this case, the publicity campaign resulted in a greater number of female applicants, but the centre was unable to cope with the demand due limited resources, leading to the comment that '*there are too many women*'. even though there were relatively more male than female trainees in this centre. This problem of limited accommodation did not arise in the case of male applicants. It was also suggested that women with disabilities tend not to be encouraged by their families to attend training.

Table A3.5 DPW Centres - Trainees by gender and disability type, 1997

	Males	Females	Disability type	Total Trainees
DPW 1: Lopburi	n.a.	n.a.	Pd (90% Deaf (10%)	148
DPW 2: Samut Prakan	90	25	Mainly physical disability (94%) Deaf (6%)	115
DPW 3: Ubon Ratchathani	36	34	Mainly physical disability; 3 deaf trainees	72
DPW 4: Ubon Ratchathani	92	22	Mixed disabilities	114
DPW 5: Khon Kaen	200	0	Mainly physical disability	200
DPW 6: Chiang Mai	53	42	Mainly physical disability	95

Total DPW	**(79%)**	**(21%)**		

Age Group

The DPW centres cater to people with disabilities aged 17 to 40 years. While an age breakdown of trainees was not provided for all the centres visited, the example of one of the centres may illustrate a more widespread pattern. In this centre, three quarters of the trainees were aged over 20 years. One in four were aged 15 to 20, the usual ages at which young people attend training courses.

Table A3.6 Trainees in DPW 6 by age group

Age-group	**%**
15 - 20	26
21-30	52
31 - 40	22
(N = 95)	100

Educational Level

A detailed breakdown of current trainees' educational level was also provided by one of the centres visited.

Table A3.7 Trainees in DPW 6, by educational level, 1997

Educational Level	**% of trainees**
No formal education - illiterate	4
No formal education - literate	8
Primary	37
Secondary	34

High School	14
Vocational School - Diploma	2
Bachelor's Degree	1
Total (N = 95)	

The vast majority of trainees in this centre (88 per cent) had attended school, while only 12 per cent had not done so. This figure contrasts with the general figure reported for Thailand as a whole: in 1995, 3.08 per cent of children with disabilities were reported to be attending school. Thus, trainees attending this DPW training centre are representative of a small minority of the population of disabled people in the country as a whole - those who have received an education.

While information on the educational level of trainees was not provided for the other centres, the fact that these centres take educational level into account and require trainees to have literacy and numeracy skills for many courses suggests that the educational profile of their trainees may be similar. Although the centres report an 'open door' admissions policy, disabled people with no formal education, who make up the majority of disabled people, may in practice 'self-select' out of the system.

A3.2.5 Instructors

The DPW centres had 41 vocational training instructors overall. In most of the centres, the instructors had some form of qualification - either as a practitioner in the skill (e.g. electrical appliance repair) or had a qualification to teach the subject (e.g. dress-making). Many centres also used volunteers to supplement the instructional staff. Instructor-trainee ratios varied considerably - from 1:10 in one centre to 1:29 in another.

Table A3.8 Instructor number and instructor/trainee ratios, 1997

	No of Instructors	**Instructor:Trainee ratio**
DPW 1: Lopburi	10	1:15
DPW 2: Samut Prakan	5	1:23
DPW 3: Ubon Ratchathani	7	1:10

DPW 4: Ubon Ratchathani	4	1:28
DPW 5: Khon Kaen	8	1:25
DPW 6: Chiang Mai	7	1:15.8
		1:18

Several centres mentioned the lack of instructors, and in particular, the lack of qualified instructors as a major constraint which they faced.

A3.2.6 Certification

On successful completion of their courses, which generally last one year, trainees are awarded a certificate by the Department of Public Welfare. Some centres said that their certificates were recognised by the Department of Non-Formal Education and could be used by trainees to access other non-formal education courses. These certificates are not comparable to the skills training certificates obtained by graduates from mainstream vocational training courses, which are recognised by the Department of Skills Development of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Since the certificates from the DPW centres are based on attendance at courses of varying content, and presumably with varying standards, they serve as little more than a record of achievement in a specific context, rather than as an indicator of performance against national standards, against which an individual's competency can be measured.

A3.2.7 Labour market linkages

The DPW training centres had some contact with local employers, particularly when it came to recruitment of trainees on completion of their courses. Some centres invite employers to come to the centre. In one case, an employer provides work for trainees to carry out during their training. Another of the centres reported that the vocational training instructors had close contact with the staff of local factories and that trainees go to local companies for on-job training during their vocational training programme. One centre reported that employers are consulted on the course content, when new courses are being set up.

A3.2.8 Funding

The DPW centres are government-funded, although private donations may be made and two centres at least have set up foundations to facilitate this. An annual allocation is made to each centre, on a per capita basis. This allocation is made from the annual Government budget, rather than from the Fund for the Rehabilitation for Disabled Persons, which is the source of funding provided to NGOs.

Many of the centres reported budgetary constraints, which prevented them from hiring instructors, employing disabled graduates as training aides and acquiring adequate, up-to-date training equipment. These constraints are likely to increase, given the cutback in Government expenditure in a range of areas.

A3.2.9 Outcomes

On completion of training, some trainees go straight into employment, others apply for loans to start their own small business from the Fund for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons, while others wait for a work experience placement or a job. It was not always clear whether graduates entering employment got jobs in which they used the skills obtained in the training centre.

Some of the centres carry out initial follow-up either by phone or using a questionnaire, but few have the resources to continue this, and it is hard to say whether those who entered employment on leaving the centre retained their jobs or for how long they did so. High initial placement rates are not always maintained. Some centre directors identified the lack of suitable accommodation as being a problem, particularly for female graduates - while they may obtain employment, they do not have satisfactory living quarters, and thus often leave the job and return to their homes, often in villages where employment opportunities are limited.

A3.2.10 Current Constraints

DPW training centre managers identified problems in a range of areas. Many lacked sufficient qualified instructional staff, and felt that the quality of instruction and its relevance to labour market opportunities would improve if refresher courses were provided regularly for existing staff.

Another major constraint was the lack of training equipment which reflects current practice in employment. In one case, trainees on a computer course shared one computer between four or five. In another case, trainees in electrical and electronic appliance repair trained using equipment (such as televisions sets, radios) which are no longer in common use.

Some centre managers felt that the lack of a standard curriculum in the DPW centres was a constraint, with implications for the standard of training and for the employability of trainees on completion of their courses. One manager hoped to develop more advanced training in the centre.

In some cases, the centre was constrained by the lack of sufficient space - training on some courses was carried out in cramped surroundings, or unsafe buildings. An additional constraint which has implications for the centre's capacity to cater to female trainees was limited dormitory space.

One centre identified as a constraint the lack of employment opportunities for former trainees who did not wish to return to their villages on completion of their courses. In this case, plans were being developed to set up a workshop to employ such trainees. Others felt that the training courses themselves did not provide trainees with marketable vocational skills, and that the programme as a whole needed to be reviewed.

A3.3. NGO Centres

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role in providing services for disabled people in Thailand. This role is recognised by the Government, which provided for NGO representation on the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons.

Nine NGOs run training centres for disabled people in different parts of Thailand - including Bangkok, Pattaya, Chiangmai and Khon Khaen. The skills courses include computer programming and applications, electrical and electronic repair, Thai massage, handicrafts, leatherwork , dress-making and carving, among other activities. As in the case of DPW training centres, the courses are predominantly residential, with trainees attending generally for one year but in some cases, two years.

Public funding is available under the 1991 Act to NGOs which provide medical, education, social rehabilitation and vocational training services to disabled people. Most of their funding comes through donations, however, and several NGOs report that the fund-raising effort is a time-consuming one which absorbs considerable energy and resources.

Two NGOs training centres for people with disabilities were visited during the study tour. The centres were included in the study for purposes of comparison with the DPW centres.

One of the NGOs runs a large, residential centre providing training in computer applications and programming, and electrical/electronic appliance repair to 200 trainees with physical disabilities. The second runs a residential programme in computer skills and massage for 17 blind people. These courses were developed to meet labour market opportunities identified by the centres. Formal education was a requirement for entry to most of the courses provided.

Over half of the trainees (59 per cent) in one of the centres were female, while in the other, almost a quarter were women. The manager of the second centre felt that, even though the centre would willingly accept more female trainees, parents were often reluctant to let girls leave home.

The instructor/trainee ratio in these centres was more favourable than in the DPW centres - 1:10 or less compared to the average rate of 1:18 for DPW centres.

In one of them, almost all of the instructors had a disability and were generally employed by the centre on graduation.

Both of the NGOs had sufficient up-to-date tools and equipment for each trainee. When a need for specific equipment was identified, donations were sought or funds raised to purchase it.

The NGOs were dynamic in their approach and emphasised the marketability of the training skills they provided. One had very strong links with employers and reported 100 per cent placement of graduates up to recently, with some decline in this noticeable lately due to the economic crisis.

Both NGOs received some Government support for their programmes, but relied mainly on their own fund-raising efforts to finance their current and capital expenditure. Limited funding and the difficulty in getting land for expansion were the main constraints which these NGOs face.

A3.4 Vocational Training in Special Schools

Two special schools - a school for children with different disabilities and a school for deaf children - were visited during the study tour. The schools include vocational training courses as part of their curriculum, in one case from age seven onwards and in the other, from the 7th class onwards. One of the schools recently opted to admit non-disabled pupils in a 'reverse' integration decision. The schools are funded by the Ministry of Education.

One of the schools offers vocational training courses in agricultural activities (chicken farming and mushroom rearing, vegetables and flowers); leatherware and blind massage. The occupational skills training starts when pupils reach 7 years. Massage training is provided to blind pupils from the time they are 10 years old. Pupils with intellectual disability are trained in agricultural activities and poultry raising. On-job training or further training elsewhere is arranged for some pupils. Blind pupils often go to work in Bangkok, while pupils with intellectual disability often go to work as child care workers at another school for intellectually disabled children or at a Government-run home, or find farm work locally.

From 1998, some pupils with physical disability from this school will study in the skills development centre, and will get a certificate from the Department of Skills Development (DSD) of MOLSW, which will make it easier for them to get a job.

In addition to the ordinary school curriculum, the school for the deaf provides vocational training in ceramics, confectionery, batik, welding, and several other handicraft activities. This training is provided from 7th - 9th grade, with each course lasting for a term of 5 months. Pupils can take more than one course.

Fifty students have left the school to date. Hairdressing, dressmaking, hotel work (cleaning) and printing were mentioned as areas of employment. Others have failed in their search for work, reportedly because they are unable to communicate with hearing people. Some find work, but not always in the skill areas they have been trained in, or go to work with their parents.

A3.5 Mainstream Training

A Cabinet Resolution of 12 July 1994 specified that all vocational training institutions should be open to disabled persons. This policy is reflected in the National Rehabilitation Plan, which aims to promote access by people with disabilities to mainstream training centres. The extent to which this policy is being implemented, the form in which this is being done and the effectiveness of the process have yet to be systematically documented.

The study tour included a visit to one skills development centre offering training to disabled people. The format of the training in this centre involved a group of 14 disabled trainees sharing in the same premises as non-disabled trainees, but in separate skills and as a group of disabled people, rather than attending courses alongside non-disabled people. One of the mainstream trainers had been allocated the task of training the group of disabled trainees, but there was no evidence that an induction programme had been provided to this person, although advice was provided by the DPW centre on attitudes to disability and on adaptations which may be required. The disabled trainees continued to live in the DPW centre, during their training in the skills development centre. A second centre reported that 3 trainees were attending a nearby mainstream training centre, at their own request, while a third had sent 36 trainees to a skills training centre for upgrading of their skills in industrial sewing machine operation. It was not possible to visit these centres during the study tour, though, so no information was obtained on the format of the ‘mainstreaming’.

Several DPW centre directors spoke about constraints to mainstreaming. People with disabilities are prevented from attending mainstream training centres by their lack of education, which excludes them from most courses. They are also constrained by the cost involved; by the inaccessibility of most training centres; by the lack of information about the services available; and by the fact that mainstream centres are only willing to train disabled people who are completely independent.

A3.5.1 Support to mainstreaming

An innovative example of how mainstreaming can be promoted was provided by the one of the NGOs visited. This centre employs technical specialists as resource persons to support the integration of blind pupils into mainstream schools. In addition to this, it provides pre-school preparatory course for blind children aged five to seven, before they go on to primary and second level schools, and later to university. The centre also produces teaching materials, particularly text books,

and buys equipment for schools on a cost-sharing basis. It trains and supports teachers from mainstream schools in the teaching of blind children, and provides training to personnel of other organisations to produce Braille materials in Thailand and abroad. This centre also provides support to vocational training in the form of scholarships; and support to the employment of blind people. It employs technicians who are available to companies to adjust or adapt machine and provide other technical support.

The centre is part of a foundation which provides vocational training courses massage and computer skills, and community-based support to blind people who work from home.

The centre's model has been adapted from approaches in use internationally and has proven to be successful, although its operations are limited by low staff numbers and inadequate resources. While the model is being applied in the area of education and employment at the moment, it could be adapted to apply to the integration of disabled trainees into mainstream vocational training centres. This point is taken up again in Section 4.

The resource centre raises funds through donations, although these are not as forthcoming as in the past. Government funding was provided for the past two years, although its contribution was cut in 1997.

A3.6 Employer views

A small number of interviews were carried out with employers who have recruited disabled workers. Employers were identified in cooperation with the Office of the Committee for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons. The discussion with these employers focused on the skills of disabled workers on recruitment; special adaptations, if any, which were required; their productivity as workers; their motivation levels and retention rate; the extent to which they integrated into the workforce and any issues which, in the employers' views, needed to be tackled.

One employer, involved in shoe manufacture, recruited disabled workers regularly from a DPW Centre and felt that the disabled workers required more training than non-disabled people when they come to the company, but have a higher retention rate, are more patient and more focused on the job. The company provides two hours training a day for up to 16 days to disabled recruits. After this, if appointed, they are put on the production line, and are guaranteed a minimum wage and receive an additional amount if they reach their output target. This employer felt that, if more support was available from the training centre, the training required for disabled people could be shortened and made more efficient.

Another employer, which is involved in the production of electronic parts for export, recruits disabled graduates from an NGO training centre. This employer

did not need to provide additional training to the recruits, who are employed in consultation with the training centre manager on the basis of their attitude, knowledge and technical ability.

Another employment centre visited in the course of the study provided employment opportunities for disabled people indirectly, through the provision of a production facility to other employers on condition that they employ disabled workers. Most of the work done in this facility was low-skill assembly work. Workers are paid less than the minimum wage about 130 Baht per day, and work in poor occupational safety and health conditions. This employer is planning to become involved in agricultural work, including horticulture, fishery and animal husbandry. He sees the need to place greater emphasis on education, for people with disabilities, which he thinks particularly suitable to disabled people with little or not education which he views as the key to the acquisition professional skills and the improvement of their living standards.

A3.7 Comment

The National Plan for the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons sets out to expand vocational training opportunities for disabled people in special centres run by government and NGOs, and in mainstream centres. This is done by direct training service provision by the Department of Public Welfare, by partial funding of NGOs, training programmes, and by encouraging mainstream centres to accept disabled trainees. While progress has been made to improve opportunities during the 1990s, opportunities are still limited and people with disabilities attending vocational training represent a small minority of those who could benefit from training. DPW centres are constrained by limited resources, which prevents them from employing enough qualified instructional staff, acquiring sufficient up-to-date training equipment and upgrading their training premises' concerns have also been expressed about the relevance of some of the training courses to current labour market opportunities, and about the marketability of the skills disabled trainees acquire.

NGO centres visited during the study emphasised the market-relevance of their skills training. They were more innovative and dynamic than the DPW centres, but were constrained by low levels of funding. Mainstreaming initiatives are being promoted, but it is unsure to what extent, in what format and whether sufficient preparation is being made to ensure their success.

The lack of formal education prevents many disabled people from availing of most of the training courses offered in the DPW centres, as well as by NGOs and mainstream vocational training institutes. The National Plan sets out to tackle this problem, but it will not be resolved quickly. There thus seems to be a need for a greater number of training courses which provide disabled people with marketable skills, without requiring literacy and numeracy. Innovative approaches are called for, which may depart from the traditional time-based, curriculum based and centre-based model of training currently in use.