

**REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON DISABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT,
2-4 October 2002, ADB Headquarters, Manila**

**Opening Statement
By
Ambassador Raimo Anttola**

Honorable Chairman, distinguished workshop participants, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

I am greatly honoured to have an opportunity to open this seminar on Regional Workshop on Disability and Development. It is even more gratifying for me as I have been involved in this exercise during its early stages when I was in charge of the ADB Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland in Helsinki.

Poverty reduction is a common overriding objective of international development. Our understanding of poverty today is multi-dimensional. This means that poverty manifests itself not only in the *economic, money-metric* dimension such as in low incomes and consumption but also in its

- *political* dimension that includes civic rights and 'voice' of civil society;
- *human* dimension that consists of access to basic services;
- *social protection* dimension as an awareness of the role of vulnerabilities and livelihood security in poverty alleviation; and
- *socio-cultural* dimension that refers to status, dignity and self-respect.

In addition, the requirements of *gender equality* and *environmental sustainability* are issues that cut across all the dimensions of poverty and human development.

As you all know very well, at least one person out of ten is estimated to have a disability of some kind. Furthermore, among the poor the risks of disability are higher, and among the disabled, the risks of becoming poor are higher than among others. This is a vicious circle that the human kind has been witnessing, particularly in the developing world which is struggling with scarce resources in order to provide balanced development to its inhabitants.

The focus of international development cooperation on disability and the disabled people is important in its own right, as a human rights requirement that all of our governments are committed

to. By targeting to the disabled people, we also have a good likelihood of reaching to some of the most vulnerable, often isolated, powerless and poor segments of societies.

Yet, rather than seeing the disabled as an appropriate *"target group"* in development, my government finds it important to conceive the disabled people - and other disadvantaged groups - as active agents, partners and experts in the design of development policies and programmes. Involving disabled people, not only in specific projects targeted to them, but also in the *"mainstreaming"* of our policy design and societal planning, is an effective way to ensure that our policies and plans are viable and sustainable for more and more of our citizens.

An *"enabling"* societal environment can facilitate *"independent living"* by the disabled people. This is definitely in the interests of both the disabled and the non-disabled. Even the most strict and stubborn ministers of finance appreciate the enormous economic benefits of the idea of independent living: The crux of the idea is that neither the disabled, nor anybody else in our societies should be conceived as a "cost" for the society. We believe that most of the disabled people can take an active role as contributors to the growth of our national economies and to the welfare and diversity of our societies through appropriate rehabilitation and assistive technologies, disability-sensitive architectural design, empowerment and affirmative strategies and inclusion.

From the point of view of disabled people themselves this type of thinking may sound little too instrumental. Yet, *"independent living"* is an important goal and principle also for people living with disabilities for a variety of other reasons related to the dimensions of poverty and welfare:

- Being able to exercise their own civic and political rights;
- being able to have access to basic services;
- being able to have independent capacity to manage one's livelihood risks; and
- being able to strengthen the status of disabled in our societies and perhaps also their self-respect.

As you all have read, the purpose of this workshop is to *"identify disability issues within the Region and to develop solutions to meet the needs of this community"*. This topic is very challenging in various ways, but we are not, however, starting from the scratch. Most of you are aware that this workshop is not a one-off event, but one step in a longer process: A similar workshop - the first ever ADB-workshop on Disability and Development - was arranged in the same place 3 years ago. It was organised in collaboration between the ADB, Disabled People's International (DPI) and the

Government of Finland. I am pleased to convey to you the warmest regards from our Finnish colleagues who facilitated the first workshop: Under-Secretary of State Mr. Pertti Majanen, then Ambassador of Finland to the Philippines, Secretary General of Parliamentary Advisory Board for Finland's Relations with Developing Countries, Ms. Anita Kelles-Viitanen and Secretary General of Finland's National Council on Disability, Mr. Kalle Könkkölä, then Chair of DPI.

The outcomes of the previous workshop are available to us in a highly informative report. Those interested to study the report more in detail, can download it from the ADB webpage. However, I wish to use this opportunity to memorise you on some of the recommendations of the workshop. It was agreed that progress against these recommendations would be reviewed in a few years time, in other words, now, in this workshop. Three years ago it was recommended - for instance - that:

- As an immediate result of the workshop, disability concerns should be incorporated into the ADB's new poverty reduction strategy. Furthermore, their concerns should also be integrated to ADB procedures and guidelines, not only on disability-specific activities but in all areas of societal development.
- ADB should match its commitment to disability with appropriate resource allocation and reallocation.
- Governments should be sensitized to disability. At the national level, the demand for disability sensitive development approaches would require more attention from key players to the needs and concerns of disabled people.
- ADB should support the development of national capacity to gather and disseminate information on disability and good practices of inclusive development.
- The staff capacity in ADB should be strengthened to take into account the disability dimension of poverty reduction and development. The ADB Training Unit should arrange for the development of a training module on disability. ADB should also ensure that a person with expertise in disability and poverty reduction be appointed.
- Disability concerns should be worked into all ADB-guidelines, terms of references for consultants and dialogues with governments. Disability will be handled and seen in the context of the larger picture of poverty reduction and social development.
- The social screening of the Bank's projects should include an analysis of the foreseen impacts on people with disabilities. All development programmes and projects should be appraised and evaluated for their relevance to ensure that the outcome is pro-poor, pro-disabled, barrier-free and not handicapping.

Furthermore, to ensure a meaningful participation of disabled people at community level, it was recommended that:

- It is crucial to support the organizing of people with disabilities, in order to make them "*visible*" in the communities and to empower them to make their voices heard. ADB should, therefore, initiate identification of existing organisations of disabled people. Caution should be exercised not to bypass or exclude organizations of disabled people in favour of welfare organizations working for disabled people.
- Various disability groups often have differing needs and strengths and, therefore, it should be ensured that all relevant disability groups will be given a 'voice'.
- It is important to utilize the expertise of disabled people, by involving them in project identification, monitoring and evaluation. ADB should institutionalize the involvement of disabled people and their organizations in this process.

The Government of Finland, myself, and my colleagues in Helsinki will be interested in hearing what progress has been achieved towards these goals by year 2002. As I said in the beginning, the Government of Finland would like to see the current workshop as one important step in a longer process that started 3 years ago, and that will definitely continue for the years to come.

I wish you all a very successful, practical and action-oriented workshop! Thank you and salamat po!

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(www-osoite: <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Conference/Disability/default.asp>).