

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN DEVELOPING DISABILITY STRATEGIES NATIONALLY AND REGIONALLY

By:

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“Disability and Development – the Role of Governments”

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Chairperson, Distinguished International Leaders on stage, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I want to express my sincere appreciation to the organizers who planned this significant workshop.

Before delivering my speech, I would like to express my sincere condolences for the late Dr. Henry Enns unexpected passing away. Dr. Henry Enns, in his gentle manner eagerly planned this workshop hoping for productive results. He was also to be one of the main speakers at this workshop. Henry's life ended while conducting research in Sri Lanka. It is indeed shocking news for everyone. Those of us left behind by Dr. Enns would like to continue his mission in the disability field. Let us commit ourselves to this workshop on “Disability and Development” to make it successful and meaningful as Henry would have hoped.

The first time I met Dr. Henry Enns was in Singapore in 1981, the year the UN declared the “International Year of Disabled Persons” (IYDP) when Disabled Peoples International, (DPI), the first international organization of persons with cross-disabilities was born. Henry, the representative from Canada, and I, the representative from Japan became the first members of DPI's World Council. For the past 20 years we have worked together to address global issues related to disability.

I would like to begin my speech using IYDP as my starting point since it created our foundation. It is my hope that this will be helpful for the World Development Bank to understand the history of the international disability movement.

In 1975, the United Nations passed a resolution, “Declaration of on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”. Since many countries did not translate this Resolution into their own languages, people concerned with disability issues felt it was necessary to develop a more effective resolution. The United Nations then proceeded to pass another resolution, designating the year 1981 as “The United Nations Year of Disabled Persons” which created epoch-making waves globally. Worldwide disability movements became like large ocean waves resulting in a greater quality of life as they continued to develop.

The identity of persons with disabilities has changed drastically since that time; persons, who were totally dependent on others, such as medical doctors, nurses and family, etc., began to strive for independence, to live independently as much as possible. They realized that persons with disabilities can also make decisions concerning their personal matters even when attendant care is necessary.

It was not only the UN Resolution that encouraged the disability movement; the UN also clearly stated that disability in itself was not a problem, rather environmental barriers.

The disability movement developed with UN support. Many companies around the world supported the IYDP motto of “Full Participation and Equality” of persons with disability. Many persons with disabilities were up front with these events, but unfortunately, the global community was unable to change so quickly. It became apparent that it would require much work and persistence. It did result in the UN designating 1983-1992 as “the UN Decade of Disabled Persons”. Much effort was invested to achieve its goals.

Do you think that decade achieved its goals?

Evaluations conducted at the end of the decade showed evidence of much effort BUT less implementation. After many serious discussions, the UN adopted another resolution, “Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities”, and began to promote the UN Standard Rules. At the same time, the UN assigned Mr. Bengt Lindquist as a reporter on Disability to monitor it. Mr. Lindquist, a person with a visual impairment was one of the founders of DPI and an Ex-Minister of Social Security of the Government of Sweden. He reported to ECOSCO three times and appealed that in addition to the UN Standard Rules, an international agreement was necessary. Actually, before his third report in February 2002, the United Nations General Assembly decided to establish an Ad Hoc Committee to formulate an international human rights treaty of persons with disabilities which was proposed by the Government of Mexico. This was the fourth proposal related to the human rights of persons with disabilities. At that time, we felt like a ripe apple that fell to the ground.

This special committee met for 10 days in July/August 2002 at the New York UN Headquarters. The contents will be reported to the UN General Assembly this fall. The primary purpose of the meeting was to have an international treaty for the human rights of persons with disabilities formulated and implemented.

Before the end of the UN Decade of Disabled Persons, people who were concerned with disability issues in the Asia Pacific Region promoted the “Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons” which was approved at the ESCAP General Assembly in Beijing, China. This decade was proposed by persons with disabilities, not by UN experts. We, persons with disabilities, have a responsibility to be active participants.

NGO network campaign activities were held in several countries. The last campaign was held in Hanoi, Vietnam in December, 2001 where a resolution was accepted to set up another decade after the Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons. At ESCAP’s 58th General Assembly held in Bangkok this May, it was resolved to declare a new decade. Since the document from ESCAP’s 58th General Assembly has very important contents, I recommend that everyone take time to read it. Actually, my speech is to be about “the Government’s Role”, but if simplified, it could be entitled “Implementing ESCAP’s Resolution.”

Since this year marks the end of one decade and the beginning of the next, we need to discuss a plan of action for this new decade. In order to proceed with this creative discussion,

ESCAP will hold a high-level intergovernmental meeting in Otsu City, (by the greatest lake in Japan) Shiga Prefecture, Japan from the 25th to the 28th of this month. Prior to the ESCAP meeting, there will be two other major conferences, also in Japan. DPI will hold their 6th World Congress in Sapporo from the 15th to the 18th of October followed by the Rehabilitation International Asia-Pacific Regional Conference known as the “Osaka Forum” in Sakai City, Osaka from the 21st to the 23rd with the aim of identifying significant issues related to disability and making recommendations for the ESCAP meeting. The NGO Networking Campaign will also conclude this year and form a new NGO Collaboration.

I would like to give an overview of how DPI developed over the past 20 years. Rehabilitation International (RI) was formed primarily by professionals such as medical, educational, vocational and administrative experts who ignored persons with disabilities attending the 1980 RI World Congress in Winnipeg, Canada. The delegates with disabilities attending felt strongly that an international organization of persons with disabilities needed to be formed. After a preparation period of one year, DPI was established in Singapore in 1981.

DPI soon gained UN consultative status as an NGO and, raised its voice and participated in UN decision-making along with RI, the World Blind Union and the World Federation of the Deaf. Since UN agencies valued the input of NGOs, DPI participated as a consultant whenever UN agencies held meetings regarding disability issues. As a result, their policy implementation was definitely effective.

The movement of DPI, a world-wide NGO is based on regional strategy; Europe, North America, South America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific Regions have been developing their own movement to meet their regional needs.

I was elected as Chairperson of the Asia-Pacific Region for 15 years. Now I have become an Honorable Chairperson.

Now I would like to share about DPI’s Asia and Pacific regional development. I am unable to mention all the details, but the Asia and Pacific Region of DPI has worked closely with ESCAP, just like two persons running with three legs. – Oh yes, we walk together.

DPI’s motto, “A Voice of Our Own” recognizes that when small individual voices get together, they can create a large voice. Therefore, we have been working to develop national assemblies of cross-disability organizations in each country. The plan of operation is to identify persons with disabilities with leadership potential and give an opportunity to learn organizational and management skills, then provide support to empower them. When they have reached a satisfactory level of skills, DPI plans an international event in one of their countries. When DPI schedules their annual international conference, they also hold an international training seminar for persons with disabilities. In this case, DPI requests that the national and local governments as well as the economic sectors support them. This opportunity has proven to be effective in empowering persons with disabilities in organizational development, networking and collaboration.

The regional conference and international seminar held concurrently in a different country every year, are sponsored by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). DPI continues to recommend persons with disabilities from each country to go to Japan for a one month training course also sponsored by JICA. Some questions have been raised in terms of effective use of finances due to the cost of air fare, accommodations, etc. Since South to South strategy can be more effective, the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability is being established with the mission to empower persons with disabilities and promote a barrier-free society. It is expected to officially open in 2004 in Bangkok, Thailand.

The Resolution passed at ESCAP's 58th General Assembly, Section 4-7, clearly welcomes this Center and at the same time is asking for the support and collaboration of Governments in Asia and the Pacific as well as NGOs.

I would like to quote Resolution 58/4, "Promoting an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region in the twenty-first century: the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific", paragraph 6 since it is related to this workshop:

"Mindful also that recent World Bank estimates suggest that disabled persons may account for as many as one in five of the world's poorest, that disability limits access to education and employment and leads to economic and social exclusion and that poor people with disabilities are caught in a vicious cycle of poverty and disability, each being both a cause and a consequence of the other, and welcoming initiatives of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank to integrate disability concerns into their poverty alleviation programmes."

The disability movement has many challenges including poverty reduction of persons with disabilities which I have experienced in my work in the Asia-Pacific Region. I feel that the disability movement can effectively contribute to those challenges. National DPI organizations in this Region have been growing and empowering leaders with disabilities. I believe this movement will continue to develop.

However, in the 1990s, the Asia-Pacific Region was hit by a major economic crisis. Many persons with disabilities began to lose their jobs and funds for their organizations began to be cut off. Due to the lack of funds, meetings could not be held to address the economic crisis issues. Many organizations experienced financial crisis with no funds for transportation, communication, rent, etc. It became difficult to have international meetings. The economic crisis hit the most vulnerable part of society, in terms of disability and development.

The economic crisis has now begun to be overcome in many countries due to the efforts of the World Bank, IMF and Governments. From this experience, the issue of poverty reduction has become critical; we need to push forward and be committed to the disability issue. Since ADB organized this workshop to develop a strategy to reduce poverty on the disability population, all of you, as experts, are invited to discuss ADB's mission, goals and strategies.

Now I would like to talk about ADB and World Bank matters in the past two years in relation to the Japanese Government. This year at the Millennium Summit the Japanese Government offered 10 Billion yen as a Japanese Social Development Fund to the World Bank as well as 10 Billion yen for the initial fund of the “Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction” to ADB. These funds are not a loan, but grant aid to be evaluated by a third party. I highly evaluate the expertise of these bank officers.

At the Tokyo Symposium held one year after the fund was operating, Mr. Motoo Kusakabe, Vice-President of the World Bank’s “Japanese Social Development Fund” reported that in order to alleviate the serious situation at the present time, this Fund needs to be made available directly to the poorest of the poor and socially disadvantaged. In this way, the Fund may be more effectively used for social development and reducing poverty. This can be evaluated by a third party. That was not an easy statement for him to say to the World Bank based on past experiences.

The World Bank found that projects where citizens collaborated with NGOs had a much higher ratio of success which shows that collaboration with a community-based NGO is a basic necessity.

Mr. Shoji Nishimoto, Director General of Strategy Policy for ADB’s “Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction” proposed that this Fund could be combined with a loan system and provide fund assistance for social development projects on poverty reduction if there was a qualified standard. He goes on to propose that ADB projects have a “citizens’ participation approach with collaboration with NGOs at the community level.

Both the fund support and the loan system are changing. Mr. Nishimoto also reports: “All ADB projects should be re-designed for poverty reduction strategy. After the year 2001, 40 per cent of ADB’s public loans should be allocated for poverty reduction..”

I would like everyone to note that the strategy of both the Banks’ funds and their experiences are very similar to NGOs. I have often quoted the metaphor, “It is not good to pour rain on a jungle.” If you do, only the top leaves are enriched with no drops reaching the bottom of the trees. The amount of aid and support are the same but in fact often only top Government sections and organizations have been enriched by the aid. NGOs have been playing the role of connecting the top and bottom. Therefore, I encourage all of you to cooperate and collaborate with the leaders of NGOs.

ADB shows that at least 40 per cent of the loans should be allocated for poverty reduction. I don’t have enough data to verify the 40 per cent figure. However, it is more important to recognize ADB’s statement that all projects should be re-designed to develop a poverty reduction strategy.

I would like to propose that ADB add one more important policy; that is to re-design all projects to consider disability issues. ADB should stipulate that all buildings constructed with ADB loans need to be accessible for persons with disabilities; all documents should be

accessible for persons with visual impairments, etc. This policy should not be made by ADB only, but in consultation and collaboration with NGOs and community representatives.

I like to mention two topics **that are deeply related to Asia**. There is **one** unforgettable person **in Asia** who has been fighting poverty. Dr. Amartya Sen, an Indian Professor at Cambridge University in the U.K., is the only recipient of the Nobel Prize of Economy. Dr. Sen made a comprehensive proposal regarding poverty and the disability issue. We might consider inviting him as a speaker for this type of workshop. One of his proposals is “Human Security”. Mr. Obuchi, the late Prime Minister of Japan agreed with Dr. Sen’s proposal and offered a “Human Security Fund” proposal to the United Nations. This UN Fund is also a major resource for poverty reduction. As a first step to working together, I hope this workshop can collaborate with the “Human Security Fund.”

ESCAP’s 58th General Assembly in May this year began with the issue of education. At the World Summit held at Kananaskis, Canada this past June, there was an appeal to implement “Education for All”. The report points out that only 2 per cent of children with disabilities have access to education in developing countries. This motto, “Education for All” came out of a conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990.

Regarding policy-making, **it** is based on data. However, some data conceals reality. So how can we read the data concerning poverty? According to the World Bank’s estimation, 20 per cent of the world’s poorest population is people with disabilities. Can we divide the poorest population into a 4 to 1 ratio? No. Perhaps the 4 out of 5 population are family members and/or community friends of persons with disabilities. In reality, the village and community situation might not separate the 4 to 1 ratio according to disability. On the contrary, in the eyes of developed countries, all of the 5 portions have some kind of disability. I think that all of the 5 have a burden of disability rather than just 1 out of 5 being disabled. As I mentioned, there is not enough data.

Lastly, I would like to propose that ADB set a budget five times greater than the research figure to combat and reduce poverty reduction, including the disability issue.

We are in the second year of the 21st century. For us as persons with disabilities the 21st century begins now. The UN ESCAP Asia and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons is ending, and we are beginning a new decade. In this new century, let us combine our strength and walk together. Let us walk together hand in hand.

Once again, may I express my sincere sympathy for the great loss of Dr. Henry Enns who committed his life to our goals. His spirit will continue to live within us.

Thank you very much.