Economic Empowerment for Persons with Disabilities: Time to Be in Business

By Monthian Buntan

Member of the Senate, Royal Thai Parliament and Member of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
How can CRPD contribute to the Disability Inclusion in the Post-2015 Development Agenda?

Especially with regard to The Right to Work as the Mean to Economic Empowerment.

**CRPD** is the best disability-thematic legally binding instrument, but needs to be understood, recognized, respected and followed by the mainstream society beyond the disability communities and close allies, especially those in the mainstream development field which failed to recognize PWDs in the year 2000 in the UN document like MDGs, and make sure that it will never happen again in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.
Why Do we Need Disability Inclusion in the Post-2015 Development Agenda?

PWDs constitute fifteen percent of the world population (around one billion people). However, the majority of them don’t work!?

In both developed and developing countries, the unemployment and underemployment rate of PWDs is much higher than those without disabilities. This extremely disproportionately imbalanced figure between being consumers and the contributors to the economy by the majority of this one billion people could predict the failure of this development agenda ahead of time if it is not recognized by those who decide the content of the agenda.
It is CRPD which sets a clear mandate on ensuring the right to work of PWDs, but what we need is how to implement it effectively. We, in the Asian and Pacific region, have come up with good MDGs-style strategy which contains clear and time-bound goals, targets and indicators, so-called the Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.
The Incheon Strategy Goal 1:
Reduce poverty and enhance work and employment prospects

The Decade must see greater progress in reducing poverty among persons with disabilities and their families. Persons with disabilities experience significant labour market disadvantages, have less economic participation and hence are disproportionately poorer than persons without disabilities. Having a decent job and the necessary education, training and support to keep that job is one of the best means of overcoming poverty. Those who can and want to work must therefore be better supported, protected, and equipped to do so. This requires more accommodating labour markets. Lifting persons with disabilities and their families out of poverty would contribute to the achievement of inclusive growth and sustainable development.

**Target 1.A** Eliminate extreme poverty among persons with disabilities  
**Target 1.B** Increase work and employment for persons of working age with disabilities who can and want to work  
**Target 1.C** Increase the participation of persons with disabilities in vocational training and other employment-support programmes funded by governments

**Core Indicators**  
1.1 Proportion of persons with disabilities living below the US$ 1.25 (PPP) per day international poverty line, as updated by the World Bank and compared to the overall population  
1.2 Ratio of persons with disabilities in employment to the general population in employment  
1.3 Proportion of persons with disabilities who participate in government-funded vocational training and other employment-support programmes as a proportion of all people trained

**Supplementary indicators**  
1.4 Proportion of persons with disabilities living below the national poverty line
What has been done to promote and protect the right to work for PWDs from past to present?

Mostly emphasized on either open labour market and supported employment through:

- **Affirmative action/positive measures**, such as quota system and tax incentives,
- **Prohibition of discrimination** based on disability including denial of reasonable accommodation.

Although these two measures have been proven to be somewhat successful, they tend to work in the urban and industrial setting and serve only two types of employment categories. They also disproportionately concentrate on treating PWDs as employees. Unfortunately, the majority of PWDs live in developing countries in mostly in rural areas where agricultural sector still dominates economic activities. Therefore, most PWDs do not benefit from such measures.
1. **PWDs** should be encouraged, promoted and supported to become self-employed, to develop their entrepreneurship capacity or even to own and operate their business.

2. **The mainstream business sector** should be included as a key stakeholder in order to ensure its openness, accessibility and inclusiveness for PWDs as customers, work force and business partners.
Toward Disability-inclusive Business

Customer
- Recognized
- Forgotten

Employee
- Employed
- Distrusted

Company
- Partnered
- Discriminated
Economic independence of DPOs is very important to ensure their effectiveness, sustainability and self-reliant.

Most DPOs and many disability-related NGOs are not economically independent, making them less effective, unstable and often influenced by donors/supporters.

Owning and operating business, such as social enterprise, could help them become more economically independent while helping to create more jobs for PWDs.
What Has Thailand Done Since Ratification of CRPD with regard to Economic Empowerment?

Through enactment of Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act of 2007 and supplemented by its first revision in 2013, Thailand has:

• Required both private enterprises and government agencies to employ PWDs at least one percent of the workforce or to provide preferential treatment to PWDs through different schemes in order to promote goods and services by them or, for private enterprises, pay levy to the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Fund,

• Prohibited all forms of discrimination against PWDs including in the area of employment,

• Penalized those who violated such requirement and reward those who followed it through measures, such as tax incentives and public announcement.
What Has Thailand Done Since Ratification of CRPD with regard to Economic Empowerment?

Utilized Persons with Disabilities’ Empowerment Fund through:

• Providing interest-free loan to PWDs who want to start or expand his/her business,

• Support project, programs or activities by DPOs and other disability-related disability-NGOs which meet the minimum standard of “good governance.”,

• Supported (in the near future) establishment and operation of community-based comprehensive service (including vocational rehabilitation and job placement service) center for PWDs by DPOs, other disability-related NGOs and local government authorities throughout the country.
Conclusion:

In order to make the spirits, principles and mandates of this great convention the reality, we need to be **economically empowered**.

It is the economic power, we possess, which will help us change our lives, our communities and the society we live in because it is the economic power which, like it or not, rules the world.

It is the economic power, possessed by DPOs and allies, which will help us work tirelessly in order to convince those who will decide the shape and form of the Post-2015 Development Agenda that they could not simply ignore the disability sector and that **Disability-Inclusive Development must be incorporated into the mainstream development agenda at all levels.**
Let us give up on giving up.

Thank You!