

Sustainable Development for the Disabled People in Vietnam

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The disabled people constitute an indispensable part of the human resource. This army comprises some 5.3 million people and the task of training and job creating for them is not only a humanitarian effort but also a decisive part of the struggle against the poverty. To ensure a high growth rate under current conditions, the Government has to solve a lot of urgent problems, including the sustainable development for the disabled people. After many years, however, this effort didn't produce intended results. This paper aims at analyzing the situation of the disabled (especially difficulties affecting the development of this part of human resource), obstacles to implementation of policies on this group and to directions of this effort, thereby suggesting some measures to ensure a sustainable development for the disabled in a non-profitable approach.

We cooperated with the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs in examining and estimating the conditions of the disabled people in 2007 in terms of their ages, physical conditions, causes of their injuries, educational level, living and ability in some selected cities and provinces. After processing the collected data we reaped the following results.

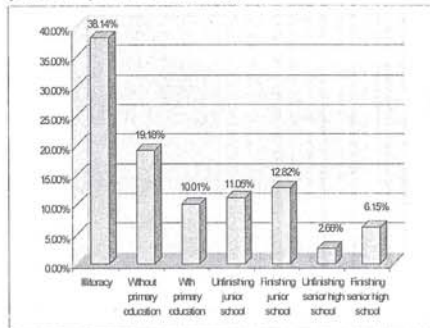
1. Characteristics affecting their employment opportunity

a. The disabled labor force includes 5.3 million people representing some 6.34% of the population; and some 70% of them were in the working age. Their physical conditions, and causes and degrees of injuries were diverse: 35.8% were born with congenital defects; 32.3% suffered serious diseases; 25.5% were disabled by war; and the rest suffered other causes (industrial accidents, occupational hazards, and road accidents). People with motor disabilities represent a high percentage: 29.4% suffered sight disability; 13.8% hearing disability; 23% nerve-related disabilities, and the rest had multiple disabilities.

b. Most of disabled people (87.2%) lived in rural areas where the infrastructure, living conditions and facilities for them were very poor, and they meet with a lot of difficulties in traveling, communicating and integrating into local communities.

c. Their educational level was low: 38.14% of them were illiterate; 20.06% had primary education and 23.87% finished junior secondary schools. Most of them couldn't make a living by themselves: 70% of them depended on their families and only some 25% could make some money. Of this group, however, most of them were self-employed persons, or seasonal and poorly-paid employees.

Figure 1: Educational level of the disabled people of 16 years old and higher



Source: Survey conducted by Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs in 2007

d. The group tended to increase because of road and industrial accidents, and injuries caused by bombs and hazardous substances used in war time; natural disasters; and other diseases.

This situation forces policy makers, the MLWISA, NGOs and related bodies to cooperate in ensuring the proper living standard for the disabled people and work out programs to develop the disabled human resource with a view to helping them get employment and reasonable income needed for supporting themselves and their families instead of relying on pensions or charity; and programs to prevent this group from getting more numerous.

2. Policies on the disabled people

Policies on employment for the disabled people are included in the Ordinance of the Disabled People, the Labor Code Articles 125 – 128 of Chapter XI; Specific regulations about adolescent labor and

other kinds of laborers), Decree 81/CP dated Nov. 23, 1995 providing details and guidelines on implementation of some articles about the disabled people in the Labor Code; Decree 116/2004/ND-CP dated April 23, 2004 providing amendments to Decree 81/CP, Interdepartmental Circular 19/2005/TTLT/BLĐTBXH – BTC – BKHDT issued jointly by MLWISA, Ministry of Finance and MPI to provide guidelines on implementation of Decree 81/CP and Decree 116/2004/ND-CP.

This bulk of subordinate legislation and laws provide detailed regulations about implementation of articles in the Labor Code encouraging vocational training and employment for the disabled people, supply of low-interest loans from the National Employment Fund to the disabled people, proportion of the disabled people as employees in an organization, establishment of employment fund for the disabled people, preferential treatment to vocational centers for and organizations employing the disabled people, tax incentives for vocational centers for and organizations employing the disabled people, short-term training courses for the disabled people, and working time and rest for the disabled people, etc.

On Oct. 24, 1006, Decision 239/2006/QĐ-TTg was made to approve the project to support the disabled people in the years 2006-2010 and set forth many objectives for this period. Some of these objectives were about vocational training and employment for the disabled people, such as:

- Mutual supporting organizations for the disabled people come into being in 80% of provinces and cities.
- Financial support is available for 70% of disabled women.
- Health care service is available for 70% of the disabled people.
- 3,000 disabled people receive orthopedic treatment and functional recovering treatment.
- All disabled children are exempted from tuition fees and 70% of them enjoy education service of any forms.
- 80,000 disabled persons get training courses and employment.
- All public works and transport means have ways for the disabled people.
- From 20% to 30% of existing public works are repaired to ensure access for the disabled people.

After studying these policies, we saw that Vietnam had made enough laws and policies to ensure vocational training and employment for the dis-

abled people. The implementation of these policies in recent years, however, hasn't produced intended results. According to Vietnam Association of Business, Enterprises of People with Disabilities (VABED), up to 2007, only 3% of the disabled people were provided with training courses and employment. Such a poor result comes from the fact that there was no mechanism for forcing related governmental bodies to implement effectively and consistently policies on the disabled people. This situation requires the central and local governments, NGOs, and companies to make greater efforts to perfect policies on vocational training and employment for the disabled people and implement them effectively in order to develop this part of human resource.

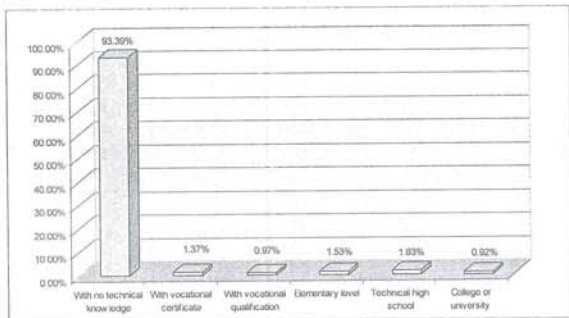
3. Education for the disabled people

There were 252 vocational schools, 212 3-year colleges and technical schools, and 404 vocational centers in Vietnam today, along with some 800 employment offices, continuing education centers and a lot of training courses given by companies, civic organizations, individuals and traditional guilds (MLWISA, 2007). To serve the disabled people, there were 58 vocational schools and centers and some 400 businesses run by the disabled people (VABED, 2007).

After the project to supply short-term training courses to the disabled people financed by the National Target Program has been carried out for four years, the results were as follows: In 2005 a fund of VND11 billion was spent on training 3,400 disabled persons; these figures were VND18 billion and 5,500 persons in 2006; and 25 billion and 8,000 persons in 2007 respectively. They are estimated at some 30 billion and 10,000 persons in 2008 (VABED, June 2008).

Circular 19/2005/TTLT/BLĐTBXH – BTC – BKHDT issued jointly by MLWISA, MoF and MPI reads, "companies of all sectors, and under all forms of ownership, should have the disabled people as part of their workforce according to the following proportions: 2% for companies in power, metallurgy, chemicals, geologic investigation, survey and mapping, exploitation of oil and other minerals, capital construction, and transport; 3% for companies in other industries; or make a payment to the Employment Fund for the Disabled People based on the number of disabled laborers they fail to employ." According to the survey conducted by the Commission for Social Affairs, however, only a handful of organizations implemented well this reg-

Figure 2: Expertise of the disabled people above 16 years old (%)



Source: MLWISA 2007 Survey

ulation, such as HCMC Tax Agency, Chân Thiện Mỹ Company in Hải Dương, Chanshins in Đồng Nai and some other enterprises for the disabled people.

Although Article 24 of the Ordinance of the Disabled People requires that, "All public services shouldn't refuse to employ the disabled laborers qualified for vacancies they want to fill," most companies and organizations give various reasons for refusing the disabled candidates. One of the most reasonable excuses is the fact that they can't find disabled candidates with necessary qualifications or skills. We should, however, accept this explanation because it is one of reasons why untrained disabled people couldn't get employed.

With existing scopes, vocational centers and schools can only produce a handful of skilled disabled people every year. According to VABED in 2007, only 8,000 disabled people were trained in some occupations and only 3% of the disabled people in Vietnam had finished some vocational training courses. Thus, the task of giving vocational training and employment opportunities to the disabled people becomes more difficult, and imbalance between supply and demand in the labor market for the disabled people gets more serious.

The number of businesses run by, or employing, the disabled people has doubled since 1995: from 177 businesses and 7,821 disabled peoples as employees in 1995 to some 400 businesses and over 20,000 laborers with some disabilities (VABED, 2007). These figures show that in spite of efforts and support made by local authorities, the number of disabled persons who get employed has increased very slowly in comparison with the demand from the disabled people.

We can see that there are only a few vocational centers for the disabled people and they are not evenly located. While 80% of the disabled people live in rural areas, 80% of such centers are in big cities, especially in Hà Nội and HCMC (VABED, 2007). Moreover, training programs and subjects are not reasonable; learners get more theory than practice; most centers lack programs and facilities specially developed for the disabled people. Trainers don't even have knowledge, skills and awareness of technical and educational problems with the disabled people.

4. Employment of the disabled people

By examining surveys of workload for laborers with and without disabilities, we see laborers with disabilities have many strengths that are beneficial to employers: (1) laborers with disabilities usually gain equal or better performance compared with normal laborers; (2) they work harder and pay more attention to safety at work than their normal co-workers do; and (3) they tend to feel more attached and loyal to the workplace and they are ready to offer more efforts to their jobs. In short, employment of the disabled people can provide employers with chances to tap their potentials.

The demand for, and supply of, the disabled people as laborers have become a potential market. It is also affected by market forces but it is in serious imbalance because of various factors from the emerging economy. Reality shows that development of the labor market for the disabled people is sensitive to government's policies, and interest and care from NGOs, companies and the whole society as well.

5. Reasons for shortcomings in training and employing the disabled people

The implementation of policies on vocational training and employment for the disabled people is not consistent and effective. Supervision of the implementation is not regular. The disabled people still meet with great difficulties in getting vocational training and employment although most of them have good conditions, ability and enthusiasm. There are many reasons for this situation:

Firstly, many disabled persons are not in good conditions because of their bad health, defects or

lack of facilities. They need special means of transport. They find it hard to go to vocational centers and companies open to the disabled people because their education level is low and they live in rural areas. Many persons who suffered birth defects so they have less chances to socialize with others. They tend to be passive and suffer some inferior complex and lack a strong will.

Secondly, only a few employers are aware of conditions of the disabled people and willing to hire them. Although the Vietnamese society has made good progress in recognizing the equal status of the disabled people, many people, including corporate managers and laborers, have no right concepts of the disabled people and their right to employment. And as a result, they lack trust in skills, discipline and performance of persons with disabilities. More seriously, some of them don't want to work with the disabled people, or think they are doing them a favor when accepting the disabled people to their companies or teams.

Thirdly, the disabled people can't get easy access to existing means of transport and appropriate working conditions. At present, no means of transport in Vietnam, including public service vehicles, has facilities for the disabled people; and most premises have no wheelchair access, which prevents the disabled people from going from their houses to workplace.

Fourthly, vocational schools and centers and businesses open to the disabled people are not distributed evenly and reasonably in the country. While 80% of the disabled people live in rural areas, only 20% of such institutions are built there and equipped with poor facilities.

Fifthly, there is always a shortage of fund for the development of the disabled people as human resource. Vocational schools and center need fund to build classroom and buy facilities needed for training the disabled people. Under existing conditions, the Government should adopt new policies to encourage NGOs, companies and individuals to invest in these schools and centers without profit motive in order to ensure a sustainable development for this part of human resource.

6. A non-profit approach

In many workshops on the vocational training and job creation for the disabled people, NGOs usually use the concept that 'the disabled people are the poorest among the poor.' This means that NGOs pay special attention to the disabled people in their humanitarian activities. Really and truly, the poor without disabilities can find jobs – at least manual ones – and earn a living while persons with disabilities can't do so if they don't receive free training and jobs appropriate to their disabilities and skills they are trained in. Thus, the training and employment for the disabled people is really a matter of national importance. Success in this effort is a decisive factor in the struggle against poverty in Vietnam.

Table 1: NGO aid to Vietnam in recent years

Year	Value (US\$ million)	Year-on-year increase	Note
1999	81	14%	-
2000	83	2.5%	2000/1999
2003	84		
2004	140	68%	2004/2003
2005	175	25%	2005/2004
2006	216	14%	2006/2005
2007	253	17%	2007/2006

Source: Report on NGO aid over years by the Committee of Foreign NGOs

The Government, civic organizations and individuals, especially NGOs, have been interested in this matter just because of social benefits instead of profit. In recent years, many disabled people have taken free training courses from classes financed by the Government and NGOs; and more and more vocational centers and businesses open to the dis-



Photo by Huynh Tho

abled people have been formed by NGOs for non-profit purposes. In the coming years, this effort can gain bigger achievements if resources from the Government and NGOs are put in vocational centers and businesses open to the disabled people, and at the same time, local authorities perfect the policies in order to create a favorably legal infrastructure for organizations and individuals engaging in this program.

7. Some suggestions

(1) Perfecting policies on development of the disabled people as part of the human resource to promote the vocational training and job creation for the disabled people; reviewing implementation of these policies in recent years in order to discover shortcomings and obstacles in this field; adopting policies to encourage organizations and individuals engaging in this effort thereby working out better policies on this issue.

(2) Disseminating laws and policies on the disabled people among local governments, NGOs, local organizations and individuals, and families of the disabled people.

(3) Examining and collecting data from vocational centers and businesses open to the disabled people in the whole country in order to redistribute them more evenly, especially in rural areas and traditional guilds where the disabled people are living.

(4) Directing local governments to form Employment Funds for the Disabled People; investigating obstacles to operations of such funds; and carrying out regular inspection of these funds to ensure their good performance.

(5) Requiring contractors of public works, especially communications, to build wheelchair access, and adding such facilities to existing works in order to remove barriers to social activities against the disabled people.

(6) Working out a system of classifying the disabled people according to their disabilities or defects as a basis for an overall program to train them in suitable occupations and skills and enhance their employment opportunity.

(7) Creating favorable conditions for all organizations and individuals, especially the NGOs, to engage in the vocational training and job creation for the disabled people; keeping on giving free short-term training courses to the disabled people as required by law; reforming training programs, textbooks and teaching facilities used for training the disabled people; and linking training with job creation in order to ensure a sustainable development of this part of human resource. ■

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