

Inclusive Employment: A Model to Increase Employability for People With Disabilities In Lao PDR

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ABSTRACT

Summary: This paper discusses a program in Lao PDR aimed at increasing employability for people with disabilities. It highlights various barriers that prevent the participation of people with disabilities in employment. Due to difficulties in accessing education, they often lack skills that match labor market requirements and confidence to self-advocate for employment connected to their interests. Lack of initial professional experience and negative perceptions and beliefs about disability lead to discrimination by some employers, limit access to employment opportunities, and create an unsupportive work environment. A survey conducted in Vientiane revealed that on-the-job training is the preferred model by people with disabilities rather than formal vocational training centers. The program adopts a blended approach to inclusive employment. It involves interviewing job seekers and employers to understand their needs and offer advisory services on diversity and disability inclusion. Additionally, a 6-month internship program is provided for employers lacking pre-employment training, along with a monthly stipend for basic needs and accommodations. Results include increased employment opportunities for people with disabilities, improved private sector involvement, and the removal of existing barriers. The program enhances skills through on-the-job training, contributing to the overall employability of people with disabilities in Lao PDR. Background/aims In Lao PDR, various barriers restrict the participation of persons with disabilities in employment. Due to difficulties in accessing education, they often lack the skills that match labor market requirements and the confidence to self-advocate for employment connected to their interests. Lack of initial professional experience and negative perceptions and beliefs about disability lead to discrimination by some employers, limit access to employment opportunities, and create an unsupportive work environment. A survey conducted in Vientiane revealed that on-the-job skills development is the preferred model by people with disabilities rather than formal vocational training centers. The program will be implemented in Vientiane, Lao PDR from 2024-2027. Methods Based on an analysis of barriers and opportunities, the USAID Okard project has developed a blended approach for disability-inclusive employment. The program interviews job seekers and employers to collect data to identify profiles. Some employers already have a pre-employment training program for newly recruited staff but need guidance to hire people with disabilities. For these employers, a package of advisory services comprised of sessions on diversity, equity and disability inclusion, accessibility and reasonable accommodation is offered by the project. For employers who don't have the pre-employment training program, a 6-month internship program is provided together with the package of advisory services. If not already covered by employers, a monthly stipend is provided by the project to support a basic wage and reasonable accommodation. Additional support is provided through peer-to-peer support, and systematic follow-up visits by a job coach to monitor progress on skills development, capacity and confidence in the workplace. The employers are supposed to designate a buddy and provide on-the-job training, coaching and mentorship to the interns so that they can grow and succeed in their roles. Results The initial results from the project include1)

Increased number of persons with disabilities who are matched with employers' requirements and gain professional and technical skills; 2) Improved involvement of the private sector in disability inclusive employment; 3) Removal of existing barriers that prevent the participation of persons with disabilities in employment. Conclusions This program represents an effective training program that allows job seekers to gain professional experiences and enhance skills and employability through on-the-job training provided by employers. It also helps reduce existing barriers to inclusive employment and provide necessary skills needed in the labour market. This project, therefore, contributes to increasing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Lao PDR.