

DISABILITY INCLUSION

Collated Solutions
On Civic Engagement
For People With Disabilities



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Advocacy Collated Solution

Digital For All - Digital Inclusion for People with Disabilities

I. Project Background

Various factors influence the ability of individuals with disabilities to engage fully and equally, such as personal circumstances, living and working conditions, broader socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors, and access to healthcare services. According to the World Report on Disability (2011), globally, many individuals with disabilities face poorer socio-economic outcomes compared to those without disabilities.¹

Cambodia's Royal Government is launching its Digital Economy and Society Policy 2022-2035, aiming to build a vibrant digital economy and society. To achieve this, inclusive policies are crucial to ensure equal participation for all, including people with disabilities. By prioritizing accessibility and inclusivity such as implementing universal design principles, providing assistive technologies, and raising awareness of the disability rights among the public, Cambodia can create a more equitable society, enabling people with disabilities to contribute and thrive.

II. Goal and Objectives

a. Overall Goal

“Digital For All - Digital Inclusion for People with Disabilities” project aims to increase inclusive civic engagement for people with disabilities, by raising awareness of digitally inclusive civic engagement strategies, inspiring behavior change, and influencing policymakers of the digital literacy and inclusion requirements for people with disabilities.

b. Objectives

- I. To engage and consult with relevant stakeholders including ministries, national and sub-national stakeholders, and people with disabilities through co-creation workshops to provide insights, strategies and input for digital pathways to access civic engagement.
- II. To deliver a digital advocacy campaign to generate interest in digital approaches to civic engagement and further feedback on the challenges from the general public and people with disabilities.
- III. To inform and influence policymakers about finding dialogues as a collated solution through a dissemination workshop.

¹ Ministry of Social Affairs Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation, Disability Action Council, & National Institutes of Statistics. (2023). PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN CAMBODIA : FINDINGS FROM THE CAMBODIA DEMOGRAPHIC AND HEALTH SURVEY, 2014 & 2021-22. In access2cambodia.org. Retrieved July 9, 2024, from <https://access2cambodia.org/ptoaftec/2024/02/Situational Analysis Persons with disabilities in Cambodia Final.pdf>

III. Context Changes

The co-creation workshop served as the first initial activity in the project, bringing together key stakeholders including people with disabilities, government representatives, NGOs, and CSOs. The purpose was to facilitate discussions, identify key challenges, and propose solutions related to people with disabilities' access to digital civic engagements. However, after completing the first two workshops, it became evident that adjustments were needed in the workshop's methodology and the direction of the digital advocacy campaign. The findings revealed issues such as accountability, transportation accessibility, and reasonable accommodation, which differed from the anticipated digital barriers. This led to a shift in focus towards exploring broader advocacy approaches that encompassed both digital and non-digital aspects of civic engagement.

IV. Outcomes

A desk review pinpointed four primary civic engagement topics concerning people with disabilities: education, social benefits, rehabilitation, and employment. The co-creation workshops were structured to delve into these barriers, gather insights, and brainstorm innovative solutions for people with disabilities. It also encouraged collaboration and nurtured open dialogue among stakeholders.

a. Access to Education for People with Disabilities



Transportation

- **Barriers:** Challenges related to transportation were identified, significantly impacting people with disabilities' ability to access educational institutions and participate in group activities. These difficulties are primarily attributed to far residing areas, which also have financial implications.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - The idea of having a dormitory nearby the educational institutes was proposed to tackle this challenge through the corporation from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.
 - Public transportation is suggested to be available in the provinces to ensure that students with disabilities have equal access to transportation options and enhance their mobility within the community.

Accessibility

- **Barriers:** There are notable challenges in accessing learning materials and facilities, especially regarding the navigation of stairs to upper-level classrooms. The lack of standardized ramps and accommodations in educational institutions further exacerbates these accessibility issues. Additionally, there are significant difficulties for individuals with speech and hearing impairments in acquiring knowledge and skills.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - There is a need for standardized ramps and other facilities to accommodate students with disabilities and additional disability-related equipment based on the type of disabilities through the corporation of NGOs and the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.
 - Voice recording and note-taking on mobile phones were requested to be utilized during class to improve learning capacity, efficiency, and ease. These accommodations would significantly enhance their learning experience, enabling them to review key information at their own pace and avoid missing important details.
 - To support students with visual impairments and reading challenges, it is recommended that access to eye healthcare services and complimentary eyeglasses be provided. This would ensure their full engagement in classroom activities and enable them to access learning materials effectively.

Access to Information

- **Barriers:** Students with disabilities encounter significant barriers in accessing scholarships due to unclear eligibility criteria, which often discourages them from pursuing higher education. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness among government representatives, particularly village chiefs, regarding

special education institutes. This lack of inclusive information limits the support and resources available to these students, thereby hindering efforts to meet their educational needs and impacting their overall academic success.

- **Suggested Solutions:**

- Through collaboration with local authorities, students with disabilities are actively encouraged to articulate their needs. Village and commune chiefs are urged to consistently share current and relevant information with the disability community. Additionally, students with disabilities are expected to assist in disseminating this collaborative information to their peers.
- It is recommended to integrate the "Disability Eligible" curriculum in collaboration with relevant organizations. Additionally, students with disabilities are encouraged to proactively seek information about this curriculum from their teachers.

Digital Access

- **Barriers:** A discussion has highlighted the digital challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, focusing on the limited access to educational information and social activities due to poor internet connectivity, particularly in rural areas. The lack of digital literacy has been identified as a major obstacle, emphasizing that without the necessary skills, these individuals struggle to use digital platforms effectively for accessing and utilizing online resources.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - It is proposed to utilize traditional advertising methods such as billboards, banners, and posters to promote educational campaigns, while also working with local authorities to organize and maintain accessible information for students with disabilities. The role of students with disabilities is also an essential source of mutual support.
 - Cambodia Post is suggested to expand its telecommunications infrastructure to enable individuals with disabilities, as well as residents in rural areas, to access and utilize the e-library for their educational needs.
 - Additionally, the provision of laptops containing educational materials, along with training in digital literacy would assist students with disabilities in effectively using and navigating the e-library.

Pedagogy Capacity

- **Barriers:** There is a recognition of a digital literacy gap among teachers, arising from varying internet access between central and outlying areas. This gap affects teaching approaches and student engagement. Additionally, there is concern about the shortage of special education teachers, especially regarding the changing needs of hearing-impaired students who can only study until the eighth grade due to shifts in sign language.

- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - Special education teachers require advanced disability training to provide customized accommodations and teaching methodologies.
 - Parents' involvement in teaching early behaviors like eating, dressing, and personal hygiene is recommended to support children with disabilities. This involvement also includes providing emotional support to prevent mental health issues and help special education teachers.
 - Expanding special education services to include kindergarten programs could be a positive move for early intervention in children with disabilities. This approach would facilitate a smooth progression from early childhood education to specialized support, ensuring that children receive essential assistance and resources right from the start.

Physical, Mental Health and Wellbeing

- **Barriers:** Individuals with disabilities have emphasized the mental and physical barriers to education, citing instances of discrimination and insufficient support that contributes to feelings of depression. Furthermore, students without equity cards encounter challenges in accessing healthcare, exacerbating their mental and physical health conditions and impeding their engagement in educational activities.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - Implementing disability awareness initiatives within schools and healthcare facilities are suggested as it is believed that educating healthcare professionals will result in increased support and understanding for individuals with disabilities.
 - There is a need for ministries to promote mental health service centers, ensuring accessible support for individuals with disabilities. Providing specialized counseling can help the students with disabilities navigate challenges, leading to better well-being, academic success, and personal growth.

b. Social Benefits for People with Disabilities



Access to Information

- **Barriers:** There is a lack of social benefits awareness among village chiefs and insufficient advertisements. Clearer guidance in applying for disability identification cards was emphasized. Limited literacy among individuals with disabilities also complicates their understanding and utilization of social protection services. Additionally, employees with disabilities in unregistered companies struggle to access National Social Security Fund (NSFF) services due to a lack of information from their employers, leading to a broader lack of awareness about their rights.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - Promote awareness of Sub-Decree 108, which delineates identification procedures and hiring criteria for people with disabilities, through annual workshops or training sessions. This initiative seeks to enhance knowledge among employers and individuals with disabilities,

ensuring them with the requisite information to navigate the process proficiently.

- Utilize advertisement posters to promote hotline contact numbers (MOSVY: 1270 and NSSF: 1286) for community outreach activities, to enhance awareness about the available resources.
- It is recommended to organize regular events or workshops focusing on social protection services for people with disabilities. These initiatives aim to educate people with disabilities about their rights and available support. Additionally, informational dissemination days, community outreach activities, and advertisement brochures were identified as effective methods for reaching and informing the community about these resources.
- The utilization of megaphone advertisements in the community was proposed to ensure broader dissemination of information. This initiative should be carried out collaboratively by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation and local authorities.
- The integration of social protection service details into the education syllabus is proposed. This initiative aims to educate students about the rights and requirements of individuals with disabilities from an early stage, promoting inclusivity and reducing stigma.

Digital Access

- **Barriers:** Digital access was not seen as a top barrier, however there is an acknowledgement of its importance as digitization increases. There is a need for digital accommodations in social benefits and the challenges associated with digitizing data collection for individuals with disabilities to ensure effective resource allocation.
- **Suggested Solutions:** It is essential for local authorities collaborating with people with disabilities to undergo additional training in utilizing government applications and various disability identification methods.

Societal Discrimination

- **Barriers:** People with disabilities face discrimination from service providers, who frequently neglect their needs when accessing essential services. In contrast, it is believed that people with disabilities are discouraged from seeking social protection services due to personal perceptions of inefficiency or inaccessibility.
- **Suggested Solutions:** It is recommended to establish a dedicated counter or area specifically for people with disabilities at service centers or institutions. This measure would guarantee that they receive the necessary attention and accommodations.

Capacity of Service Coordination

- **Barriers:** People with disabilities reported experiencing a three-year waiting period for a disability ID card, indicating a delay in social protection processes. The need for improvement and limited social benefits information from the local authorities was emphasized. These issues were acknowledged, citing a lack of disability knowledge and insufficient registration resources at the commune and village levels.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - The importance of strengthening the capabilities of local authorities was recognized. There is a suggestion about providing additional capacity-building training for officers engaged in disability identification and utilizing government applications for registration. This training aims to empower officers to regularly update and uphold accurate statistics on people with disabilities.
 - It is recommended that village or commune authorities conduct registrations directly at people with disabilities' locations, citing accessibility challenges. It is also important to establish a national budget and work plan for local authorities to effectively implement these solutions.
 - Setting up a printing facility in every province to speed up the production of disability identification cards is proposed. This initiative aims to reduce the time required to obtain the identification.
 - A designated area for receiving social protection services is requested to ensure prompt assistance and support without experiencing extended wait times or overcrowding.

Accessibility

- **Barriers:** People with disabilities faced difficulties accessing social protection services due to inadequate infrastructure and facilities at commune and village halls. The lack of standardized ramps and restrooms, which do not meet essential accessibility standards, was also emphasized. Additionally, insufficient budget support for transportation further hindered the ability to participate fully and access necessary services.
- **Suggested Solutions:** The Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation shall improve infrastructure in commune and village halls to meet accessibility standards.

c. Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities



Access to Transportation

- **Barriers:** People with disabilities struggle to access regular rehabilitation services due to distant living areas, limited transportation, and financial support, compounded by the challenge of traveling alone.
- **Suggested Solutions:** The integration of rehabilitation services into community health centers was emphasized to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and enhance cooperation between the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation.

Access to Information

- **Barriers:** People with disabilities highlighted the lack of accessible rehabilitation information in local communities, noting that disability-related meetings are not prioritized at the commune level. These barriers to insufficient information provided by aging local chiefs and ineffective traditional methods

of dissemination. Implementing updated rehabilitation information requires time and resources, posing challenges for rural areas. Additionally, discrimination exists in accessing rehabilitation information.

- **Suggested Solutions:**

- It is proposed to use a megaphone in the local community to promote rehabilitation services, especially for those in remote areas. This method aims to reach a broader audience and ensure crucial information is effectively shared.
- Using Telegram for dissemination could be advantageous for elderly commune or village leaders.
- There is a suggestion to establish a sustainable network for people with disabilities to help disseminate information, as they serve as the main source of inspiration for others facing similar challenges. Alternatively, it is proposed to involve community health center volunteers to spread word about rehabilitation services.
- Short-term training courses for village chiefs in collaboration with NGOs/CSOs is also proposed.
- Conducting a workshop focused on combating discrimination against people with disabilities could educate community members about their rights and capabilities while also reducing stigma associated with disabilities.

Internalized Beliefs and Domestic Influenced Beliefs

- **Barriers:** Families' fixed perceptions about people with disabilities' abilities, lack of education on rights, and misunderstandings about rehabilitation, hinder people with disabilities from accessing services effectively. This leads to missed check-ups and communication gaps, hampering timely service delivery.
- **Suggested Solutions:** It is suggested to advocate for motivational counseling, partnering with families, NGOs, CSOs, and promoting peer-to-peer support.

Service Providers' Coordination Capacity

- **Barriers:** Rehabilitation service providers face challenges such as perceived neglect from commune authorities, coordination difficulties, financial constraints, recruitment issues and the shortage of physical therapy equipment in some hospitals.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - There is a demand for enhanced education aimed at informing disability communities and their families about their rights, with the possibility of collaboration from commune authorities.
 - To improve follow-up, it is recommended to hire more staff with local authorities' collaboration for inclusive rehabilitation services.

- It is recommended to conduct a nationwide consultation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitations to gather comprehensive input and feedback on potential initiatives.

d. Employment for People with Disabilities



Societal and Institutional Barriers

- **Barriers:** People with disabilities encounter barriers such as discrimination, insufficient accommodations, and unclear job criteria, which pose challenges in securing employment. The prioritization of profits by private companies often results in the sidelining of people with disabilities, contributing to their exclusion and difficulty in accessing employment opportunities.
- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - It is suggested to improve cooperation and law enforcement within the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), including adjusting fines for non-compliance to ensure effective implementation

and using collected fines to support future initiatives for the disability communities.

- Incorporating people with disabilities' unique skills in disability data could help private companies hire employees with disabilities more easily.
- Employers shall accommodate people with disabilities' needs for a more inclusive work environment and train employees without disabilities to reduce discrimination.
- It is suggested to provide training for department heads or team leaders to raise awareness about the challenges experienced by people with disabilities and stress the significance of avoiding any offensive behavior.

Accessibility

- **Barriers:** Workplace accessibility for people with disabilities, especially in private businesses, lacks essential accommodations like accessible restrooms, ramps, elevators, and adequate entrance/exit space. This restricts career opportunities and inclusion for people with disabilities seeking employment.
- **Suggested Solutions:** It is suggested to encourage both the government and private sectors to prioritize and put into effect extensive accessibility features such as spacious restrooms, ramps, and other facilities to create a more inclusive and accommodating environment for people with disabilities.

Access to Information

- **Barriers:** Efforts to promote beneficial policies for people with disabilities are lacking, particularly in sharing employment-related information due to limited communication channels and internet access in rural areas.
- **Suggested Solutions:** It is beneficial to allocate resources towards conducting workshops and producing publications aimed at addressing the information gap with an appropriate amount of funding.

Disability Awareness

- **Barriers:** Insufficient awareness and understanding of disabilities contribute to a lack of awareness and understanding about people with disabilities. Families frequently perceive employment opportunities for people with disabilities as highly challenging due to their disabilities, leading them to provide excessive care that can impede their integration into society. Additionally, concerns about the capabilities of people with disabilities and fears of discrimination serve as additional deterrents for families, further discouraging their support for their participation in broader activities.

- **Suggested Solutions:**
 - Private companies and institutions are suggested to participate in the disability training to enhance their comprehension of and support for employees with disabilities at work.
 - It is proposed that key stakeholders including the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation and Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training should increase their efforts to advocate for the rights of the disability communities. The focus should particularly be on educating families and caregivers for improved understanding.

PwDs' Skills as Opposed to The Job Market

- **Barriers:** People with disabilities face challenges like insufficient rights knowledge, low confidence due to societal norms and discrimination, and limited family support leading to self-discrimination. These factors impact their access to education, skills, and job opportunities, alongside livelihood issues and a lack of disability awareness hindering self-advocacy.
- **Suggested Solutions:** It is recommended that people with disabilities focus on enhancing their strength and capabilities through the development of a diverse range of skills, such as networking and self-learning. The local authorities and relevant ministries are encouraged to organize training programs tailored to the specific needs of people with disabilities. Additionally, they should provide necessary accommodations and improve access to education.

Disclaimer: The findings, primarily achieved through focus group discussions, may not fully represent the experiences and perspectives of all individuals with disabilities, as they only highlighted the feasible solution to show diversity.

Epilogue

Digital For All - Digital Inclusion for People with Disabilities

Inclusive civic engagement is essential for people with disabilities as it empowers them in decision-making, fosters belonging and well-being, creates accessible environments, and promotes understanding and inclusion in society. By involving individuals from various backgrounds and experiences in decision-making processes and community activities, inclusive civic engagement creates a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient society where all voices are heard, valued, and represented.

This collated solution serves as a catalyst for positive change, bridging gaps and breaking down barriers that hinder full participation and inclusion. Although the results were mainly obtained from focus group discussions and might not comprehensively reflect the experiences and viewpoints of all people with disabilities, the diverse perspectives still provide valuable insights and recommendations for creating more accessible and inclusive environments for individuals with disabilities. This marks the beginning of significant changes with policymakers, organizations, and communities collaborating, and there is still more effort required to ensure that individuals with disabilities can fully participate in society and have equal opportunities in all aspects of life.

“Digital For All - Digital Inclusion for People with Disabilities”, supported by USAID Cambodia through Civil Society Support (CSS) Activity under FHI 360 Cambodia co-implemented by Agile Development Group from October 2023 to July 2024, with the goal of making civic engagement inclusive for people with disabilities, by raising awareness of inclusive civic engagement strategies on digital platforms, fostering behavioral changes, and influencing policy makers of the digital literacy and accommodations for people with disabilities.