



# USAID Works to Secure Rights and Improve Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in Vietnam



Photo: VNAH

*Persons with disabilities find work as a result of USAID-provided employment training.*

## *Persons with Disabilities Become Active in All Aspects of Society*

June, 2015. Since 1990, the Government of Vietnam (GVN) has been committed to working with international donors to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in Vietnam. Advancing progress has been challenging. Initially, small-scale programs implemented without nationwide strategic guidance provided services. For example, some projects promoted inclusive education, but no laws or policies provided a framework for the education of children with disabilities. Health workers with limited technical support provided medical services. Social inclusion was a new concept. People with disabilities were not involved or included in any policy formulation that impacted their lives. There was little policy coordination across ministries that could mobilize sufficient resources. Prior to 2005, most interventions focused on rehabilitation and persons with disabilities were considered as charity subjects.

## HOW USAID IS HELPING

Since 1989, the United States Government (USG) has been assisting persons with disabilities in Vietnam. To date, the USG has contributed \$60 million in assistance to persons with disabilities. In 2005, USAID awarded the Inclusion of Vietnamese with Disabilities (IVD) program, which continues to the present. IVD assistance has helped to enable a legal framework to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities, address their medical and educational needs, and support their broader inclusion in Vietnamese society. In 2012, USAID established the Persons with Disabilities Support Program (PDSP), which focuses on direct assistance to persons with disabilities and building the capacity of local government and local NGOs to provide a sustainable network of supporting services.

**Key Achievements.** USAID programs provided crucial financial and technical assistance to support the Government of Vietnam (GVN) to draft and enact the national legal framework on disabilities. This initiative has helped to secure and improve the rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities in Vietnamese society. More than 10,000 persons with disabilities directly benefited from medical, education, vocational training, employment, and social inclusion services supported by USAID. USAID capacity building activities strengthened disability policy development and service delivery, and helped empower the disability community by supporting 17 disability people organizations.

## THE STORY

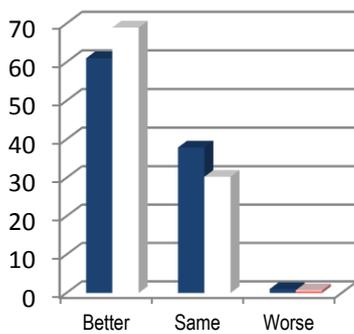
Persons with disabilities total almost 8 percent of Vietnam's population. Understanding their situation and their prospects for integration and inclusion within Vietnamese society is key to effective planning and delivery of assistance.

Assisting persons with disabilities has been a top USG priority in Vietnam since 1989. From 1989 to 1998, USAID's disability program focused on war legacy activities and was based on the traditional "medical model" with a humanitarian assistance approach. In 2005, USAID began its current ongoing assistance based on the "disability rights model".

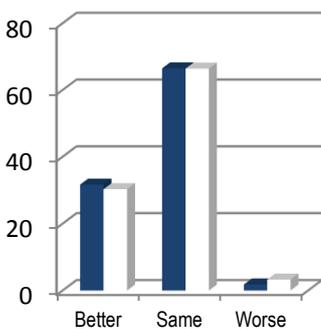
*This Performance Evaluation Brief was produced by the USAID Vietnam Evaluation, Monitoring, Support Services (VEMSS) program implemented by Management Systems International (MSI), [www.msiworldwide.com](http://www.msiworldwide.com)*

To measure the effects of USAID assistance on the lives of people with disabilities, 840 beneficiaries were surveyed. Key results are shown below and on the next page.

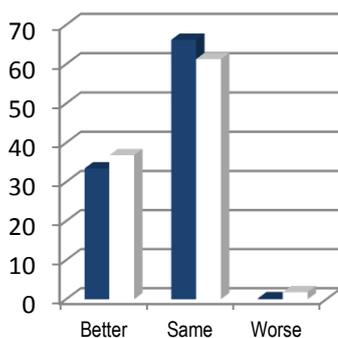
% of beneficiaries reporting better quality of life after receiving



% of beneficiaries reporting improvement in physical health.



% of beneficiaries reporting improvement in mental health.



■ Male Respondents  
□ Female Respondents

## BAROMETER OF PROGRESS

The objectives of the evaluation, developed to measure performance, include:

- Understand the extent to which the interventions have been consistent with beneficiaries' needs, GVN expectations and interests, and USAID policies (Relevance).
- Identify/explain the causality of interventions and the impacts they have had on improving the policy environment and on the delivery of services (Effectiveness).
- Assess the benefits on the ground in the daily lives of persons with disabilities (Impact).
- Evaluate progress in sustaining positive impacts of the interventions and determine if there is opportunity to further enhance the quality and quantity of the programming's benefits (Sustainability).

Regardless of the methodology used to measure the impact on the quality of life of direct services such as medical care or education, these individuals represent a constituency. Giving voice to its needs is a viable, much-needed intervention and remains a focus of USAID

## BEST PRACTICES

### *Helping Establish a Legal Framework Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

USAID provided significant technical assistance to the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) and the National Assembly (Committee on Social Affairs), which resulted in enactment of the national Law on Persons with Disabilities and 23 related laws, decrees and inter-ministerial circulars. Today, these measures govern the rights afforded to persons with disabilities, the policy focus on inclusion consistent with the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the scope of services to be provided to persons with disabilities.

### *Institutionalizing Capacity Building*

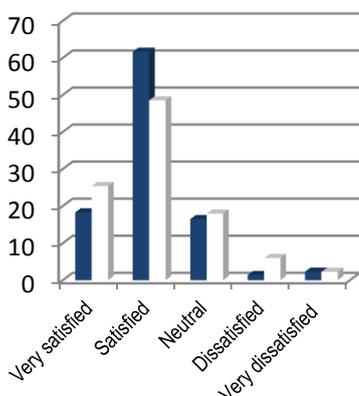
A participatory approach was implemented to assess needs and interests in developing social work training curriculums and materials specific to persons with disabilities within professional schools/universities. USAID programs helped create a network of institutional learning on this subject in four participating institutions for both undergraduate and graduate education.

### *Integrating Service Delivery into Local GVN Education Systems*

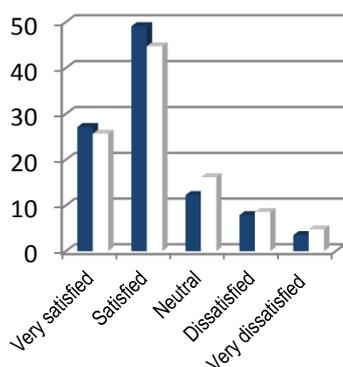
Inclusive education initiatives for children with disabilities (CWDs) were integrated into provincial human resource planning cycles to ensure that resources would be available to meet additional demands and to build education managers' and school teachers' capacities.

## ASSISTANCE SATISFACTION

Percent of beneficiaries who were satisfied with medical assistance.

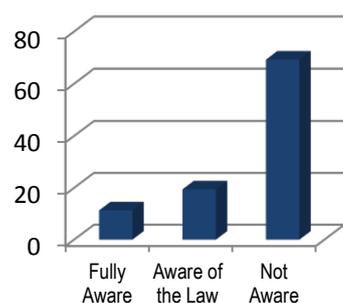


Percent of beneficiaries who were satisfied with vocational and livelihood assistance.



## AWARENESS OF THE LAW

Percent of beneficiaries who were aware of the law on people with disability.



### *Leveraging Resources with GVN and other Partners to Achieve Greater Impact*

USAID programs assisted in the development of long-term strategic provincial action plans (PAPs) for persons with disabilities, bringing together various stakeholders to coordinate multiple program activities. This helped increase the effectiveness and efficiency of USAID's assistance.

### *On-the-Job Vocational Training*

USAID assistance helped develop an inventory of employers who are interested and willing to support persons with disabilities, as well as providing the employers with orientation on how to work with persons with disabilities. The assistance also provided vocational training for persons with disabilities targeted to the specific needs of the employer and USAID programs helped facilitate recruitment of persons with disabilities and provide follow-up retention counseling.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### *Engagement and Collaboration with the GVN*

Direct engagement of USAID staff is highly valued by our GVN partners. They want to see more of us and earlier in the planning stages. More frequent and strategic engagement can foster common understanding and agreement regarding technical approaches and progress on implementation of assistance plans.

### *Clear Goals to Guide Programming*

USAID should distinguish whether future assistance will focus on the humanitarian goal of providing direct service to supplement what the GVN can afford to do, or if it will primarily serve a development assistance goal of building sustainable local systems and capacities. If the goal is the latter, then a longer program life and a more concentrated area focus should be considered. The focus and quality of interventions is shaped significantly by a clear articulation (or lack thereof) of what can be achieved. Given the time and resource limited nature of development assistance, knowing how the landscape will look once the activity is completed is important. Having a common vision helps to align implementers, communicate with beneficiaries and GVN stakeholders, and better measure outcomes.

### *Integrating Interventions and the Link to Sustainability*

Wherever and whenever possible, technical assistance should be institutionalized. USAID disabilities assistance programs operationalized high-quality, often innovative services to support persons with disabilities. They should begin to work with the GVN to identify an institutional "home" for its knowledge base.

### *The Importance of Measuring Capacity-Building*

Institutionalizing capacity development is a key challenge. To better assess capacity-building activities' success, impact and cost-effectiveness, implementing partners (IPs) should directly survey assistance recipients on their knowledge retention and use of the specific skills learned. Assessment of service delivery is notable in the effort to measure outcomes, but this does not

comprehensively capture the direct impact of training and technical assistance. Relatively easy (and more robust) ways to measure capacity exist.

### *Capture the Direct Impacts of Assistance in the Lives of Beneficiaries*

Beneficiaries are generally positive when provided services, training, etc. Better accounting of beneficiary outcomes has not been a story well told. Surveys as the one noted in this brief can be inexpensively conducted with an aim to provide data and insight on program achievements, especially how assistance impacts the daily lives of beneficiaries.

## CRITICAL CHALLENGES GOING FORWARD

### *Implementing Laws and Policy Frameworks to Sustain Progress*

The passage of the Vietnam Disability Law in 2010 and the country's ratification of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2014 were critical toward improving the legal framework to ensure the rights of people with disabilities. Implementation of the law and the international policy framework will require proactive measures to end discrimination. Direct and sustained support of the National Action Plan (NAP) and Provincial Action Plan (PAP) on disabilities should be collaborative and focused on current best practices, rather than on pilot projects that do not have sufficient resources or time to result in lasting change. More thorough and more participatory service planning should be conducted prior to service delivery.

### *Institutional Capacity Building*

Ensuring equal access to services and support for all people with disabilities is critically important. Building the capacities of the commune officials who make disability determinations such that they have the expertise, knowledge, and tools to carry out their responsibilities must be continued.

Assisting the GVN in developing comprehensive and reliable national databases to collect, synthesize and disseminate information related to adults and children with disabilities would improve the government's ability to formulate, implement and coordinate laws and policies.

### *More Effective Coordination and Management*

Coordination at the highest levels of the GVN lacks authority to resolve critical issues. Little data exist on the implementation and performance of the NAP and PAP on disabilities. This limits the ability to identify priorities and gaps in supporting the needs of persons with disabilities. USAID programs should assist the GVN with developing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation plan for NAP and PAP.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

### *Planning Project Activities*

- **Plan for sustainability.** Prior to implementation of projects, develop sustainability plans that include consultation with the relevant government officials.
- **Better collaboration with GVN.** Conduct feasibility surveys prior to implementing capacity-building activities to ensure that activities are relevant to the government's policies and national and provincial action plans, and that they can be incorporated into the government's system of service delivery.

### IVD PROGRAM MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Mrs. LM is in the hospital with her 12-year-old daughter, who was being treated for congenital brain defects which she has suffered since birth. Mrs. LM spoke of the assistance provided through USAID's IVD program:

"We have been moving from hospital to hospital for years. This is the first time we got free services in this hospital. I am very happy to see my daughter's status improving. She gets better and better every day. Now she can sit up, which she could not do for a long time. Treatment duration used to be our biggest concern. I don't have to worry about it now, since the services are all free. Hospital staff attitude is very good; they are

- **Better planning of direct services.** Include more planning and mapping of processes to implement direct services prior to rewarding awards to IPs. Require IPs to confirm that they can work in targeted provinces prior to awarding contracts and work closely with USAID/Washington to apply procedures and policies that are more consistent with the local situation.
- **Improving capacity building.** IPs should conduct needs assessments for all proposed curricula to understand what is needed and by whom relative to the identified issue. Input from the central and local government officials, local implementing partners and the targeted audience of the curriculum should be interviewed for input.

### *Implementing Laws and Policies to Sustain Progress*

- **Improve support of inclusive laws and policies.** The passage of the Vietnam Disability Law in 2010 and the ratification of CRPD in 2014 were critical to improving the legal framework to ensure the rights of people with disabilities. To this end, GVN should be encouraged to comprehensively and strategically improve and align itself with the CRPD and to be responsive to the diverse needs of adults and children with disabilities.
- **Improve monitoring mechanism.** GVN needs support to review and monitor implementation of current laws to ensure (a) the processes used to identify persons with disabilities, as well as the type and severity of disabilities, are valid and accurate, (b) the commune officials who make disability determinations have the expertise, knowledge, and tools to carry out their responsibilities, (c) persons with mental disabilities are adequately included in all disability laws and policies, and (d) all persons with disabilities, regardless of type and severity of disability, have equal access to services and supports.
- **Improve coordination and monitoring of policies.** Ensure the existence of and strengthen the effectiveness of a mechanism to coordinate action plans, facilitate equality for persons with disabilities in society and supervise the effective and comprehensive implementation of legal provisions for people with disabilities.
- **Provide better support for the implementation of laws and policies.** Direct and sustained support of the NAP and PAP on disabilities should be focused on current best practices, rather than on pilot project that do not have sufficient resources or time result in lasting change.
- **Better engage the GVN in USAID disabilities programming.** For future projects, USAID should develop a strategy to engage the GVN in evidence-based discussions on how best to support government-led disability assistance projects that use inclusive practices and policies and that are consistent with the CRPD and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- **Improve human resources and financial resources.** Expanding and improving the capacity of human resources and the local government's ability to generate revenue will enable the GVN to fully implement its laws and policies.



Photo: VNAH

*Officials learn how to enforce penalties in the law.*



*Strengthening Civil Society*

- **Build capacity for DPOs in disability advocacy.** This type of capacity building refers to teaching strategies and leadership and advocacy skills and providing the tools to influence decision-making processes in the public and social arenas to eliminate inequalities between people with and without disabilities. The purpose of this type of capacity building is to achieve respect for diversity and difference and to contribute to cultural, social, and political change for individuals' full and active citizenship.

*Improving Inclusive Education Services.*

- **Encourage dedicated resources.** Work with the GVN to dedicate more resources to providing community-based services and supports to children with disabilities and avoid the mistake of establishing new service programs and schools that do not fully integrate children with disabilities into society.
- **Encourage Inclusive Education.** Work with the GVN to establish inclusive education for all children with disabilities, as provided for in Article 24 of the CRPD. Prepare a transitional plan to transform special and segregated schools into inclusive educational programs to ensure that all children with disabilities can access and receive education within the mainstream general educational system.
- **New investments in teacher training programs.** Appropriate curricula and support for teaching children with intellectual and other disabilities are essential.



Photo: VNAH

*A person with disabilities meets with a teacher in a local school.*



Photo: VNAH

*Medical exams are among many types of USAID assistance.*

*Improving Inclusive Medical/Health Services*

- **Expand public health services.** Expand and strengthen critical public health services, particularly birth defect surveillance and newborn disabilities screening systems, throughout the country.
- **Expand direct service provision.** Incorporate the services into the government's service system and include persons with and without medical insurance. Mobilize additional human and financial resources to provide critically needed direct medical support for persons with disabilities.

*Improving Employment and Livelihood Services*

- **Identify strategies.** Continue to work with the Ministry to identify effective strategies that will lead to employment for persons with disabilities and will lead to strengthening interpersonal skills of persons with disabilities.
- **Strengthen and implement NAP.** Work with MOLISA General Directorate of Vocational Training to strengthen and implement NAP on Vocational Training for Persons with disabilities.
- **Expand opportunities.** Support career/employment counseling at schools to facilitate smooth transition to work and expand livelihood programs.



Photo: VNAH

*Dozens of people attend a community job fair.*

### *Improving Service Delivery and Management*

- **Improve coordination.** Work with MOLISA, in coordination with its provincial departments and the Provincial People’s Committee to strengthen and implement the Circular on Case Management.
- **Support government’s case management system.** Separate case management from the project. Establish and implement case management within a national service delivery system. Ensure that the case management curriculum is focused on implementing the Circular on Case Management.
- **Improve and Expand the Disability Information System DIS.** Data collection should be more robust and the use of data should be more consistently applied to create a data-driven management culture. Support GVN to expand the DIS to all provinces and sectors.