USAID OKARD

USAID Okard is a five-year project that promotes the independence and functional ability of persons with disabilities through equal access to health and social services in the Lao People's Democratic Republic. Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development's Leahy War Victims Fund and Victims of Torture Program, and the U.S. Department of State, USAID Okard partners with the Lao government and civil society to develop and implement disability inclusive policies so that no one is left behind.

Persons with disabilities are among society's most marginalized populations. Some of the major causes of disabilities in Laos are unexploded ordnance (UXO), road accidents and increasingly, non-communicable diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and stunting. Equal access to health and social services will foster inclusivity of persons with disabilities in their communities and allow them to contribute more effectively to society.

KEY APPROACHES

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Okard project partners with the public and private sectors to support persons with disabilities in the areas of health, economic empowerment and stakeholder engagement. It uses a systems-centered approach focusing on government ownership of disability inclusive policies and development of physical rehabilitation and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services for long-term sustainability. The project also applies a person-centered approach addressing the individual needs of persons with disabilities and the communities that support them. The project is primarily implemented in Vientiane Capital and in the provinces of Xieng Khouang and Savannakhet.

PHOTO: MIKAEL IMMONEN

USAID Okard directly addresses the health, livelihoods and social needs of persons with disabilities, using an evidence-based model to demonstrate tangible change in communities and the lives of persons with disabilities. This contributes to strengthening government systems and decision-making in support of the National Disability Policy and the National Rehabilitation Strategy.

HEALTH

USAID Okard trains health and rehabilitation service providers, supports health centers to provide assistive products at the local level and promotes rehabilitation as a standard component of healthcare services. It also supports Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) through trainings of service providers, counselor and peer-counseling.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

The project engages with a variety of partners including non-profit associations, governmental bodies and the private sector to implement inclusive vocational training courses, integrate persons with disabilities into the labor force and provide market-based livelihood opportunities.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

USAID Okard assists the Ministry of Health and the National Committee for Disabled People and the Elderly to better coordinate organizations and institutions that support persons with disabilities. In addition, the project strengthens disabilities-focused organizations' engagement with the Government of Laos to advance the rights of persons with disabilities, mobilize grassroots networks and engage persons with disabilities in policy design and implementation.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

USAID Okard promotes greater economic self-sufficiency, improved functional ability and the well-being of persons with disabilities and their households, especially those who have mobility limitations. The project works towards creating an environment in which persons with disabilities are empowered to actively participate in society.

- Improved access to health and rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities and their households.
- More persons with disabilities and their households employed or self-employed.
- A more supportive environment for the sustainability of health and economic empowerment improvements.
- Strengthened health systems with rehabilitation and MHPSS included in the continuum of care.

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