

CHAPTER-2

Persons with Disability-An Overview

2.1 General

In every country there are persons who suffer from one kind of disability or the other that may be congenital or acquired. Disability is also caused by ageing. The term “disabled persons” which is used commonly to refer to persons with disability should not be misinterpreted to imply that the ability of the individual to function as a person has been disabled. The term is used in this report with this caution. Globally efforts are made by several agencies to improve the quality of life of the disabled people. The work of the UN constitutes the most important action taken by an international agency in the area of disability.

It is difficult to compare the number of persons with disability in the various countries of the world mainly due to lack of a uniform definition of disability. However, it is generally agreed that the number of persons with disability among the population in the developing countries is much higher than that in the developed countries. Poverty increases the risk of disability through poor health and malnutrition. Disability with lack of support and social exclusion leads to extreme poverty level. Though many Governments have evolved policies regarding the welfare of this section of the population, much remains to be done to improve their lot globally. Persons with disabilities face all forms of discrimination and prejudices as well as all types of barriers. Women and children in the disabled population are the worst sufferers. These barriers have to be removed and participation of persons with disabilities in all relevant decision- making process has to be promoted. Special efforts are needed to ensure that anyone with disability has equal opportunities and is able to lead a dignified life.

The implementation of the welfare measures for the persons with disability depends on reliable data on their population size and characteristics. In the absence of administrative data the number of disabled persons with the types of their disabilities has to be estimated either by surveys or censuses. This is a challenging task as there are several constraints involved in collecting information on personal characteristics which are not common. The question on disability is very sensitive. The U.N Statistical Division has recommended that population census could include questions on disability. Sample surveys on disability do provide estimates at the national level. Population census, however, has the advantage of providing data for small areas which are very important for planning and implementing welfare measures at the grass-roots level.

2.2 Situation of Disability in Cambodia

In Cambodia, persons with disability constitute one of the most vulnerable groups. A considerable section of the disabled population who are amputees or persons with mental disability is a constant and grim reminder of the legacy of war and internal conflicts in the past. The country’s numerous

land mines were responsible for the loss of limbs by many unfortunate persons. There are many children and women who have one or more physical or mental disability.

The passing of the law on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in July 2009 marked a milestone in the ceaseless efforts of the Royal Government of Cambodia to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities. A Royal Sub-Decree was issued on 21 June 2010 on the composition and proceedings of the Disability Action Council (DAC) which would provide among others, assistance to Ministries, institutions and relevant organisations in the development of policies and national strategic plans relating to disability and rehabilitation. Within the legal framework, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation (MoSVY) has developed a Work Plan for 2008-2013 which includes the various measures to be taken up for the welfare of the disabled. This document succinctly describes the current position regarding the disability thus:

“Disabled people of all kinds in Cambodia account for 2% of the country’s total population. Policies for the disabled have been widely and fruitfully implemented. Rehabilitation services for the disabled are being continuously strengthened and expanded. Discrimination against the disabled has been gradually reduced. Cambodia has become a member of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. Many disabled persons have received vocational training in centers and have acquired skills so as to earn their living. The sports, art and cultural movements of disabled persons have also shown remarkable progress”.

There are several NGOs, national and international who have been taking longstanding interest in improving the lives and livelihoods of persons with disabilities in the country. Yet there are several challenges lying ahead in this regard.

2.3 Disability Question in the 2008 Census

The demand to include a question on disability in the 2008 Census Household questionnaire was made at the data users’ meeting that was attended by representatives of the line Ministries, international agencies, NGOs and others. To collect data on disability a set of four or five questions were considered necessary. It was recognized that in a huge operation like the census which was carried out by trained teachers and not by technical staff, and where the time spent by an enumerator in each household for canvassing the census questionnaire is about 30 minutes, only a simple question on disability with easily understandable definition was possible. With this background the question on disability to be included in the 2008 Census was discussed. Taking into account the recommendations of the meeting it was decided to include for the first time a question on physical or mental disability in the 2008 census questionnaire (Col 15 of Form B Household Questionnaire Part 2. See Annex 2).

The actual question canvassed and the definition used to obtain information on various types of disabilities in the 2008 Census is reproduced below:

Col 15: If the person is physically/mentally disabled give appropriate code from the list below. Otherwise enter “0”.

Type of disability

In Seeing	1
In Speech	2
In Hearing	3
In Movement	4
Mental	5

The code has to be given in column 15(a) “Since birth” if the person has the disability from his/her birth. In other words, he/she was born with this disability. If the person got this disability after birth the disability code has to be entered in column 15(b) “After birth”.

The five types of disability identified for the census purposes and their description are as follows:

(i) In Seeing: A person who could not see at all (had no perception of light) or had blurred vision even with the help of glasses was considered as having disability in seeing or as visually disabled. A person with proper vision only in one eye was treated as visually disabled. A person with blurred vision who has no occasion to test whether her/his eye-sight would improve by using spectacles was also treated as visually disabled.

(ii) In Speech: A person was treated as having speech disability, if she/he was dumb. Similarly a person whose speech was not understood by a listener of normal comprehension and hearing, she/he was treated as having speech disability. Person who stammered but whose speech was comprehensible was not classified as disabled in speech.

(iii) In Hearing: A person who could not hear at all (deaf) or could hear only loud sounds was considered as having hearing disability. A person who was able to hear, using hearing-aid was not considered as disabled under this category. A person who could not hear through one ear but her/his other ear was functioning normally, was considered having hearing disability.

(iv) In Movement: A person who lacked limbs or was unable to use the limbs normally was considered having movement disability. Absence of a part of limb like a finger or a toe was not considered as disability. However, absence of all the fingers or toes or a thumb would make a person disabled by movement. If any part of the body was deformed, the person was also treated as disabled and covered under this category. A person who could not move herself/himself or without the aid of another person or without the aid of stick, wheel chair etc., was treated as disabled under this category. Similarly, a person was treated as disabled in movement if she/he was unable to move or lift or pick up any small article placed near her/him. A person who was not able to move normally because of problems of joints like arthritis and had to invariably limp while moving, was considered to have had movement disability.

(v) Mental: A person who lacked comprehension appropriate to her/his age was considered as mentally disabled. This did not mean that if a person was not able to comprehend her/his studies appropriate to her/his age and was failing to qualify in her/his examination was mentally disabled. Mentally retarded and insane persons were treated as mentally disabled. A mentally disabled person might generally depend on her/his family members for performing daily routine. It was left to the

respondent to report whether the member of the household was mentally disabled and no tests were required to be applied by the enumerator to judge the member's disability.

If a person had two or more types of disability only one of these was recorded by the enumerator. In such cases it was left to the respondent to decide as to the type of disability she/he wanted the member of her/his household to be classified into. The disability of a person was decided with reference to the date of enumeration. Persons with temporary disability on the date of enumeration were not considered as disabled. For example, if a person's movement was restricted because of some temporary injury and she/he was likely to return to her/his normal state after sometime, such a person was not treated as disabled.

Disability "Since birth" meant that the person had the disability from her/his birth. In other words, she/he was born with this disability. If the person got this disability after birth she/he came under disability "After birth".

2.4 Priority Tables on Persons with Disability

The following ten Tables were produced as priority Tables (E-series) on Physically/mentally disabled persons:

E1	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons by 5-year Age Group and Sex.
E2	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons by Category of Disability, Marital Status and Sex.
E3	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (since birth) by Literacy in any language, Level of Education, 5-year Age Group and Sex.
E3A	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (since birth) by Category of Disability, Literacy in any Language, Level of Education and Sex.
E4	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (after Birth) by Literacy in any language, Level of Education, 5-year Age Group and Sex.
E4A	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (after birth) by Category of Disability, Literacy in any Language, Level of Education and Sex.
E5	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (since birth) by Main Activity, 5-year Age Group and Sex.
E5A	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (since birth) by Category of Disability, Main Activity and Sex.
E6	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (after birth) by Main Activity, 5-year Age Group and Sex.
E6A	Physically/Mentally Disabled Persons (after birth) by Category of Disability, Main Activity and Sex.

These tables form the basis of the present analysis. They are supplemented by a few more tables developed for this purpose. The following are the limitations of the data on disability:

1. If a person had more than one type of disability only one of them was recorded at the census. In such cases it was left to the respondent to decide as to the type of disability he/she wanted the member concerned of the household to be classified into.

2. The disabilities covered are mostly total disabilities under each type mentioned. As regards collection of information in the census on mental disability which was a very sensitive question, it was left to the respondent to say whether any member of the household was mentally disabled and no tests were required to be applied by the enumerator to judge the disability of the member concerned (See definition given above). This could have resulted in the respondents including persons who were mentally disabled partially, as totally disabled persons.

Due to differences in the definition of disability and the limitations cited above the number of disabled as per the census may differ from the estimates made by other surveys. However the various cross classifications of the disabled population involving age, sex, marital status, literacy, educational level and economic characteristics like labour force participation would be found very useful by those working in the field of disability in Cambodia. It is expected that the results of this first ever attempt to collect information on persons with disability in a census operation in Cambodia will provide a broad idea of the magnitude of the prevalence of disability under different types as well as the main characteristics of the disabled persons in the country and its regions. The results may also serve as bench mark data for the Government and the NGOs while undertaking plans and programmes for the welfare and empowerment of the persons with disability in Cambodia.