



2012/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/28

Background paper prepared for the  
Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012

*Youth and skills: Putting education to work*

## **Skills development for youth living with disabilities in four developing countries**

Maria Kett

2012

*This paper was commissioned by the Education for All Global Monitoring Report as background information to assist in drafting the 2012 report. It has not been edited by the team. The views and opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the EFA Global Monitoring Report or to UNESCO. The papers can be cited with the following reference: "Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012, Youth and skills: Putting education to work" For further information, please contact [efareport@unesco.org](mailto:efareport@unesco.org)*

**Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012  
Background Paper**

Skills development for youth living with disabilities in four developing  
countries

**Author:**

Maria Kett  
Assistant Director  
Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre  
University College London

**August 2012**

## Table of Contents

Acronyms.....	3
Abstract .....	4
1. Introduction .....	4
2. Analysis of different types of disabilities and their implication for access to education, training and employment in different country contexts .....	5
3. Skills development programmes for youth living with disabilities.....	7
3.1. Kenya .....	7
3.2 Sierra Leone.....	10
3.3. China.....	15
3.4. Sri Lanka.....	18
4. Conclusions .....	21
5. Policy Recommendations .....	23
References.....	24

## **Acronyms**

CDPF – China Disabled Persons' Federation

COOPI - Cooperazione Internazionale

CRPD - United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DPO – Disabled Persons Organisation

EADSNE – European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education

GoK – Government of Kenya

GoSL – Government of Sri Lanka

ICT – Information and communication technology

IDP – Internally displaced persons

ILO – International Labour Organisation

KESSP – Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005-2010 ()

KNSPWD - Kenya National Survey on Persons with Disabilities

LCD – Leonard Cheshire Disability

MoHEST – Kenyan Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology

MoYAS – Kenyan Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

SIYB - Start and Improve Your Business

SLUDI – Sierra Leone Union of Disabled Individuals

TEVC – Technical and Vocational Education Commission

UNDESA - United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNESCAP - United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

VTA – Vocational Training Authority

VTC – Vocational Training Centre

WPAY – World Programme of Action for Youth

YEI – World Bank Youth Employment Inventory

YMCA – Young Man's Christian Association

## **Abstract**

This paper outlines some of the key challenges and opportunities regarding skills development for youth with disabilities. It focuses on those who are no longer in formal education, but who, for a variety of reasons, are not yet in formal employment. Where possible, it outlines the extent of labour force participation amongst youth living with disabilities, and discusses the barriers to participation.

In order to highlight these challenges and opportunities, the paper explores the situation in four low- and middle-income countries to better understand how economic growth, or lack thereof, impacts on youth employment. The four countries selected – China, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Sierra Leone – all experience high youth unemployment rates (in line with many countries across the world) but for a variety of different reasons. All four countries have also made attempts to redress the inequities experienced by persons with disabilities, but as yet it is unclear the extent to which youth with disabilities have been impacted by these initiatives. This report examines what opportunities are available to youth with disabilities specifically, and how effective are they in facilitating social inclusion and creating sustainable employment.

Using case studies to illustrate successful targeted programmes, the paper also draws together information on key policies and practices that appear to be significant components in facilitating social inclusion and creating sustainable employment opportunities.

### **1. Introduction**

It is estimated that there are between 180 and 220 million youth with disabilities worldwide, of which nearly 80 per cent live in developing countries (UNDESA 2012: 6). They face the same range of issues and challenges as all young people, including lack of access to education, employment, healthcare and social services. But, as a small but growing literature on employment among youth with disabilities finds, they are affected in far more complex ways. In employment markets, youth are often the “last in and the first out,” but for youth with disabilities, even the possibility of being ‘last in’ is often not a reality. Lack of inclusion in education and skills development initiatives for young people with disabilities foreshadows a lifetime of unemployment and marginal employment among a population eager to work. To the lack of access to education, health care and social services are added discriminatory beliefs and attitudes, inaccessible environments, and physical and communication barriers that contribute to further marginalisation and exclusion from social and economic life (UNDESA 2012: 6). This may be further compounded by a range of other factors, including gender, with disabled girls being additionally disadvantaged, even compared to disabled boys.

One of the most important advances for persons with disabilities in the last decade has been the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Though it has no mention of youth as a specific category, young people with disabilities played a significant role in the drafting of the Convention and their needs and interests – many around issues of skill development and employment – are reflected throughout the Convention. But how is this being translated into practice?

The issues of skills and employment addressed in the CPRD are similar to those raised in the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY),<sup>1</sup> reflecting the similarities of the challenges faced by youth with disabilities and those of their non-disabled peers (UNDESA 2012: 14). These common areas of concern include employment issues, ranging from the creation of self-employment opportunities through to programmes to promote youth employment; voluntary programmes and technical training. These are also the areas highlighted in a recent UN Youth with Disabilities report – and include the positive role information and communication technology (ICT) is playing in the lives of many, for example the use of mobile phones and computers which can facilitate communication, participation and access, particularly in education and employment (UNDESA 2012).

## **2. Analysis of different types of disabilities and their implication for access to education, training and employment in different country contexts**

There is strikingly little information available on the employment of youth with disabilities; in some cases, broad information on employment rates for disabled young people may be available through national censuses or large scale surveys, but this information is rarely disaggregated by gender, type of disability or geographic location. This makes comparison within and between countries complicated, as there is not enough evidence to substantiate theories or design meaningful interventions. Even less well documented are school completion rates and level of qualifications attained for youth with disabilities. This makes it difficult to establish a causal link between young people with disabilities and their achievements (or lack thereof) at school, in skills training or in their transition into the workplace. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) published a report which examined the transition from school to employment in 16 European countries, including an overview of which strategies and processes were most effective, as well as an analysis of barriers and significant factors in the transition process (EADSNE 2002). These included the mismatch between vocational training and the labour market – an area that still has significant gaps globally. The report also highlighted issues of policy implementation; the involvement of students (and their families); guidance, the use of Individual Plans (IEP); and cooperation and collaboration between stakeholders. The report also discussed the variety of models used to facilitate transition from school to employment (including work placements, work experience, training schemes and accreditation); the support available; networks; as well as policy measures. Finally, it listed a number of recommendations aimed at each of these areas and for different points of intervention – from policy makers to practitioners (EADSNE 2002).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has made a concerted effort to identify issues and challenges facing persons with disabilities in attaining decent work. They have produced a number of reports and guidelines on promotion, training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, although few are specifically focused on youth (e.g. Brewer 2004; Freedman 2008; Buckup 2010; Parmenter 2011). As Freedman (2008) notes, while it is difficult to gain an accurate idea of the number of youth with disabilities in

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/events/youth98/backinfo/ywpa2000.htm>

training or employment, all evidence available clearly indicates lower rates of labour force participation and higher rates of unemployment. This disparity occurs even when legislation protects against discrimination in employment, and the situation may be worse in countries where limited employment rights or anti-discrimination policies for persons with disabilities are compounded by a lack of basic education, vocational skills training or higher education opportunities (Freedman 2008: 17). This may particularly be the case in lower and middle income countries.

Some efforts have been made to redress these inequities, particularly in higher-income countries. These range from specific education interventions, facilitated access such as support workers, ICT and other adaptations to the workplace, through to targeted training and employment opportunities.<sup>2</sup> There is not space in this paper to list the array of programmes available for young people with disabilities, but the World Bank Youth Employment Inventory (YEI) has attempted to compile an inventory of interventions designed to integrate young people into the labour market.<sup>3</sup> An analysis of programmes included in the inventory concluded that interventions oriented towards disadvantaged youth are as good, if not better, than programmes with no particular orientation (Betcherman et al 2007) so presumably this would also be the same for programmes aimed at youth with disabilities.

It is important to note that such training for persons with disabilities has begun to move away from programmes delivered through specialised institutions to mainstream programmes offered through the government, service providers, NGOs or private companies (Freedman 2008). A key role in the empowerment of youth with disabilities is to ensure they are trained in skills which are appropriate to the local labour market. This leads to a greater degree of independence and autonomy, as well as increased capacity to weather economic shocks, such as price increases or crop failure. Within a traditional context where family and community are the most important social groupings, financial contributions to the household are also a means of increasing social value and respect within the family. Youth with disabilities, if employed, are therefore regarded as contributors, not as liabilities, challenging many negative perceptions the family and community may have. However there is often still a mismatch between skills training and labour market requirements, as persons with disabilities are often taught skills thought to be appropriate to them, such as craft work, with limited scope for business expansion, rather than those skills linked to specific labour market requirements.

Therefore, what all these reports highlight is while there has been a gradual positive shift towards integrated employment opportunities, this progress is partially negated by an overall paucity of opportunities (including education, training and employment) as well as a lack of expectations (by themselves and others); and lack of support mechanisms for youth with disabilities. However, there are also a number of key intervention points for programmes and policies: the transition from school to work; so-called 'second chance' programmes, as well as training and vocational programmes that offer possibilities for meaningful intervention (EADSNE 2002, 2006; Adams 2007).

---

<sup>2</sup> See also EADSNE 2002

<sup>3</sup> Database link: <http://www.youth-employment-inventory.org/>

To illustrate these issues, four countries have been selected – Kenya, Sierra Leone, China, and Sri Lanka – to show the variety of opportunities and challenges faced by youth with disabilities in low- and middle-income countries. These countries demonstrate a range of opportunities available – and in the case of Kenya and China, some clearly successful and well-established operations have been developed by the government and partners. However, the example from Sri Lanka shows how difficult it is to create sustainable employment without addressing a range of other factors. Finally, the examples from Sierra Leone show how youth with disabilities can take advantage of non-governmental interventions to establish themselves in decent work.

### **3. Skills development programmes for youth living with disabilities**

#### **3.1. Kenya**

Youth in Kenya (defined as those between 15 - 30 years old) number around 11.99 million, and account for about 31% of the population (KNBS, 2010). Despite attempts by the government to redress the issue, youth unemployment in Kenya remains a serious issue, and seen as a potentially destabilising force in the country with an estimated 64% youth unemployment. Only 1.5% of unemployed youth have formal education beyond secondary school level, and over 92% have no vocational or professional skills training.

Disability prevalence rates in Kenya vary according to the different data collection methods used but the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (GoK 2008) found that 4.6% of the Kenyan population experience some form of disability, of which 3.6% of youth between ages 15-24 years have disabilities, with visual and physical impairments being the most frequently reported (1.1% each). 12% of youth with disabilities had either never been or were unable to currently attend school in Kenya at the time of the survey. In most parts of Kenya, the transition between primary and secondary for children and youth with disabilities is rare, and from secondary to tertiary education, all but unknown (Mugo et al 2010).

Despite this, Kenya has a number of laws and policies supporting persons with disabilities. These include the Persons with Disabilities Act (2003), which conveys rights, rehabilitation and equal opportunities for people with disabilities, although there is no requirement or incentive to comply with this law (Tororei 2009). This law also requires private and public sector employers to reserve 5% of jobs for persons with disabilities, though it does not identify 'youth with disabilities' as a specific category (Mugo et al 2010: 5). There is also a Draft National Disability Policy to operationalise the 2003 Act, as well as a draft Special Needs Education Policy. However, it has been argued that these policies are based on limited and medicalised categories of impairment, and on charity, not rights (Mugo et al 2010: 6). There is a limited welfare provision for persons with disabilities (including a disability grant and social security), however, available data is not disaggregated by age, so it is unclear how many 15-24 year olds obtain any form of welfare support (GoK 2008a).



Kenya's National Youth Policy (2008) considers youth with disabilities a priority group; however, as Mugo et al note "this category is neither mentioned in any of the ten objectives, nor is there any strategy geared at realizing the objectives for this category." (2010: 5). All of these policies are framed within Kenya's 'Vision 2030' (Government of Kenya, 2007) a development strategy encouraging sustainable economic growth, tackling poverty, and combating discrimination, including that faced by persons with disabilities (Mbithi and Mutuku 2010: 7). More recently, the Ministry of Higher Education Science and Technology (MoHEST) and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MoYAS) have begun implementing ICT programmes in some institutions with the aim of providing youth with the skills necessary to achieve Vision 2030. As the GoK has a performance contract in place in government ministries, disability is being incorporated in these programmes.<sup>4</sup>

Some mainstream youth programmes, such as the Youth Fund, initiated through the Ministry of Youth Affairs, and the *KazikwaVijana* ('work for young people') initiative,<sup>5</sup> through which young people are employed in community projects (such as water harvesting, repairing boreholes and roads, reforestation) have also made attempts to include youth with disabilities; however, there has not been a systematic attempt to ensure inclusion, nor it is clear how successful this has been.<sup>6</sup> There are also a number of targeted initiatives such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund.<sup>7</sup> Reaching young people between the ages of 18 to 35 years, the Fund has dispersed funds to youth with disabilities in cities across Kenya, including Kisumu, Nairobi, and Mombasa. There are other funds specifically for persons with disabilities, such as the National Disability Development Fund, dispersed through the National Council of Persons with Disabilities which also provides funding to youth with disabilities to establish group and personal businesses, as well as to a number of TVET training institutes.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the National Fund for the Disabled of Kenya provides persons with disabilities with equipment (but not cash grants or loans) to set up their own businesses.<sup>9</sup> Despite these laudable attempts, it is unclear how coordinated – or successful – these programmes are, or indeed who receives these grants. There has also been criticism of the lack of youth awareness about these programmes, and it is argued that these programmes reach only a small percentage of the young people with disabilities who are in need of support (Mbithi and Mutuku 2010: 8)

In Kenya, Technical, Industrial, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TIVET) covers a range of public and private institutions. The Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005-2010 (KESSP) supports the "...provision of loans and bursaries to enhance access to TIVET taking special account to marginalized groups, such as female students and the physically challenged." (Neyere 2009: 5). However, Neyere is critical of the extent to which this is actually planned, coordinated or implemented (2009: 5). Most TIVET provision is by civil society organisations, faith-based organisations, such as the Salvation Army, NGOs and specialist institutions

---

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.psrpc.go.ke/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=86:what-is-a-performance-contract&catid=103:introduction](http://www.psrpc.go.ke/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=86:what-is-a-performance-contract&catid=103:introduction)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.kkv.go.ke/>

<sup>6</sup> See 'Dispute erupts over hiring of disabled youth' 6 July 2009:

<http://allafrica.com/stories/200907061756.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.youthfund.go.ke/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://ncpwd.go.ke/info-portal/employment/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://nfdk.or.ke/>

including the Undugu Society of Kenya,<sup>10</sup> which offers TIVET and has programmes for deaf children; the International Youth Foundation,<sup>11</sup> the Karen Technical Institute for the Deaf, and the Thika Institute for the Blind. There is no specific body that coordinates or is responsible for TVET programmes. Institutions take responsibility for their own programmes with support from the Ministry of Education and training for persons with disabilities is mainly done in conjunction with disabled people's organisations (DPOs) – with the Action Network for the Disabled; Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya; Deaf Ability Initiative; United Disabled Persons of Kenya and the Kenya Union of the Blind being some of the main providers of TIVET in Kenya. United Disabled Persons of Kenya is currently developing a database to record the skills of people with disabilities to try and match them to the job market. However, it is unclear how TIVET programmes are coordinated or even partnered with DPOs. Finally, a number of disability-specific NGOs provide livelihoods and skills training, but again it is unclear how these programmes are coordinated with each other or the KESSP.

Therefore despite a range of policies and interventions there are still a number of constraints facing young people with disabilities entering employment in Kenya. These range from a lack of suitable employment; little or no access or adaptations; limited expectations of families and employers; lack of networks, contacts or social and inter-personal skills (Mugo 2010: 9). Moreover, it is argued that while there are five national vocational and technical training institutes for persons with disabilities in Kenya, with a total of some 2,400 registered attendees (not broken down by age), these institutes cannot possibly meet the needs of the large number of young Kenyans with disabilities (Mugu et al 2010: 12). However, it should also be noted that five institutions that specifically target persons with disabilities is more than many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, but even in a country with relatively good TIVET provision for persons with disabilities there is still a paucity of opportunities for youth with disabilities.

When asked why employment was so difficult to find, a significant number (over 58%) of 15-24 year olds with disabilities reported that stigma and prejudice were major problems. Interestingly this was mediated by education: the highest proportion of those who felt stigma and prejudice was a barrier to daily living had never attended school (12%), while those with university education were the least likely to report having a problem – 1.4% (GoK 2008a). However, it is difficult to establish from the survey if this reduction in perceived stigma is as a result of education, or if the person experienced less stigma and discrimination from the outset, and was therefore more readily able to access education.

The KNSPWD clearly showed that persons with disabilities who were working were most likely to be males (18%) rather than females (8%). Over a quarter of persons with disabilities work in family businesses, but a third do not work at all. Those who do work were more likely to live in urban areas. They were also likely to be better educated: 45% of those working were educated to university level; 36% to middle level education; and 22% to secondary level education. However, as Mugo et al (2010) point out, it is unclear as to the nature of this work, and in many cases, it can

---

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.undugukenya.org/usk/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.iyfnet.org/country/Kenya>

be assumed that given low levels of education, skills and expectations, those who work are likely to hold lower paid and semi-skilled jobs. Nevertheless, these statistics highlight the links between education and employment opportunities in Kenya. .

The overall conclusion that can be drawn here is that despite well-intentioned legislation and policy, youth with disabilities in Kenya still face limited opportunities to obtain decent paid work is limited, and gaining a TIVET place is one of chance and circumstance, rather than a transition that can be planned.

#### **Box 1**

Mary is a 22-year old deaf woman, from a village in the Kikuyu district. She began to knit sweaters and scarves after being given an order by a customer. She is a member of the DPO 'Muguga United for the Deaf', and when they joined the Associate of the Physically Disabled of Kenya microfinance programme in 2010, she became eligible to apply for a loan. She used the loan of Ksh.5700 to buy a supply of knitting yarn to knit more sweaters and scarves to sell. She boosted her income through this and, after paying off the loan, she went on to find formal employment in Nairobi.

(Case study from Leonard Cheshire International)

### **3.2 Sierra Leone**

Though now officially a 'transitional' country, the long civil war in Sierra Leone has left many legacies, particularly on youth – and the implications for youth with disabilities are especially profound.

The UN-led disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programmes focused on education and skills training, and enormous sums of money have been spent on programmes across the country. Youth employment was a key component of the work of the Peacebuilding Commission, as youth were seen as one of the main factors in prolonging the conflict, so re-engaging them in education and employment was considered crucial. In addition, in order to make up for the 'lost years' during the conflict, anyone between the ages of 15-35 years is considered a youth.<sup>12</sup>

Despite these various efforts the employment situation in Sierra Leone remains bleak, with the majority of the population working in low paid, informal sector employment. Accurate data is scarce, but it is estimated that over two thirds of the population engage in subsistence agriculture (and are therefore technically under-employed

---

<sup>12</sup>Peacebuilding Commission Sierra Leone (2007) Informal Country-Specific Meeting: Discussion on Youth Employment and Empowerment (Summary Note of the Chair). URL: <http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/Country-Specific%20Configurations/Sierra%20Leone/May%2021%20summary.pdf>

rather than strictly unemployed).<sup>13</sup> The youth unemployment rate is 60% – one of the highest in the world.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps most worrying is that the unemployed youth continue to be seen as a ‘latent threat’ to social stability and security.<sup>15</sup> In order to redress this, in March 2011, the current President, Ernest Bai Koroma, gave his support to the Sierra Leone Youth Employment Support Project,<sup>16</sup> following its launch by World Bank in 2010, which financed cash for work schemes and a skills development programme.<sup>18</sup> The ILO has also set up the Youth to Youth Fund, an innovative project enhancing youth labour force participation.<sup>19</sup> Funded projects include those led by youth with disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

Despite these interventions, the government is still seen to be doing little to improve youth issues.<sup>21</sup> Given the dire situation for most youths in Sierra Leone, how do youth with disabilities fare? Disability issues have had a reasonably high profile in post-conflict Sierra Leone, in part due to the sheer number of war-wounded and amputees, and a strong DPO movement which successfully lobbied for the current government to ratify the CRPD. However, it is less clear how these actions translate into concrete improvements in the lives of persons with disabilities. Sierra Leone is a very poor country, with limited social protection or welfare schemes. Therefore many persons with disabilities have little option but to take menial jobs or beg. It is estimated that there are 194,364 persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone, which is approximately 3% of the population (Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, 2011). However, as with most countries, accurate information on the number of youth with disabilities is hard to establish.

In June 2009, the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, UCL, undertook a pilot survey in five urban areas: 424 respondents were randomly selected in 11 villages.<sup>22</sup> Questions included a disability screening tool, as well as questions on household and family, education, livelihoods, employment and health (Trani et al 2009).<sup>23</sup> The results provided a snapshot of the lives of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone – of which 17% of respondents experienced some degree of difficulty; of these, 2.2% experienced very severe disabilities which require some sort of intervention and/or social protection measures.

The survey also gave some surprising results – for example, while access to school and literacy rates were similar for persons with disabilities and those without, overall this was low: 50% of female and 34% of male respondents with disabilities had never attended school. However, this should be understood in the post-conflict context – during the war, most children and youth did not attend school, or if they did, only attended sporadically. Schools and learning institutions were destroyed during the

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=SIERRA%20LEONE>

<sup>14</sup> [http://africaecon.org/index.php/africa\\_business\\_reports/read/53](http://africaecon.org/index.php/africa_business_reports/read/53)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2010/sc9890.doc.htm>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.cocorioko.net/?p=8836>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.sl.undp.org/youth.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yen/whatwedo/projects/y2y/sierraleone/main.htm>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/yen/whatwedo/projects/y2y/sierraleone/winners.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> [http://africaecon.org/index.php/africa\\_business\\_reports/read/53](http://africaecon.org/index.php/africa_business_reports/read/53)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lc-ccr/centrepublishations>

<sup>23</sup> These districts were urban and peri-urban, and thus results cannot be extrapolated to the entire country. Nevertheless, these indicate issues for persons with disabilities.

war, and teachers fled or took other jobs to survive. The government and agencies working in the country have worked hard to rebuild the education system, but entrenched challenges remain, not least the lack of resources – especially trained teachers, the limited capacity of ministries, overcrowded classrooms and significant numbers of children still not attending school (Trani, Kett et al 2010). Boys have better access to education than girls, particularly to secondary and tertiary education, yet over half of all disabled respondents cannot read, write or count. Equally striking, 12% of respondents with severe or very severe disabilities did not believe that education was useful (compared to less than 3.4% of non-disabled respondents) and more than double the number of non-disabled people (22.9%) thought that education would improve their chances of getting a job compared to persons with disabilities (10.5%).

In urban areas, only a third of respondents of working age with disabilities are employed; with 69% of disabled people having no income at all, and 28% of disabled people living in households with no income compared to 20% of non-disabled households. The overall level of unemployment is slightly higher for persons with disabilities (12%) than for non-disabled (9%). However, the situation is very different for 15-25 year olds: almost 8.5 times as many non-disabled youth are working compared with youths with any type of difficulty (152 non-disabled were working compared to 18 with disabilities, out of 170 respondents).

Children with severe disabilities are often in charge of household tasks (8.3% compared to 1.8% of non-disabled children), indicating that these children are more likely to be given housework than go to school, or be employed. This situation was slightly different in rural areas, where over 71% of non-disabled children are work in agriculture, compared with 50% of children with mild or moderate disabilities and none with severe or very severe disabilities.

Interestingly, a higher percentage of youth with mild to moderate disabilities are employed as apprentices in urban and peri-urban areas (50% compared with 9.5% of non-disabled). This may be due to the availability of targeted NGO programmes, as apprenticeships are one of the few options available for youth who do not go to school or transition to employment. Unfortunately it is not clear how many children and youth with disabilities graduate from an apprenticeship to permanent employment. The survey found no youth with severe or very severe disabilities working or in apprenticeships. They were therefore not receiving any preparation to be self-sufficient adults.

In an unpublished baseline survey undertaken by Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD) to explore livelihood opportunities, some 47% of persons with disabilities interviewed stated that they already have some form of skills – especially tailoring, hairdressing or mechanic – apparently obtained through informal training, usually from friends and relatives. However, even with specialist skills, many were still unable to find work. The majority of the respondents were youths (17-35) anxious to support their families. Most of those working were doing farming work (22.5%) or petty trading (15%). Obstacles to employment included the inability to undertake a type of work due to impairment (and therefore lack of adjustment or accommodation), lack of appropriate qualifications or opportunities for employment in the major industries (banking, telecommunications, fishing, mining and agriculture).

Those who had taken part in some form of vocational training had done so mainly through NGO initiatives, such as the YMCA, COOPI, the School for the Blind, the Grafton Training Centre and Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCD). Some of these had been initiated after the war, while others were more recent initiatives, such as LCD in Kabala. Despite the array of training places, there is also a degree of mismatching between skills training and labour market needs: the most popular skills were tailoring and business, yet the main sources of employment are farming and trading.

Moreover, half of the respondents in the survey undertaken by LCD were unaware of any vocational training facilities and only 12% said they were able to access training. Many also claimed that the training facilities were not adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities. Furthermore, young people with disabilities reported limited knowledge about government or other programmes for employment and job creation for persons with disabilities (just over 8% of all respondents). There are no special provisions for making employment information available to those living with disabilities in Sierra Leone, though LCD has recently started a Livelihood Resource Centre in Kabala, in the north of the country, which whilst not specifically targeting youths does include them in the programme. The Livelihood Resource Centre provides livelihood opportunities by way of training, employment, career counselling, business training and start-up, as well as building awareness of national and local social protection schemes and any other information on livelihood opportunities.<sup>24</sup>

LCD does however run a programme specifically aimed at youth – Livelihood Opportunities for Disabled Youths. In this project, young persons with disabilities receive training from a range of specialists in IT, cell phone electronics, gara tie-dyeing, tailoring and soap making.<sup>25</sup> Links are also made with local institutions to provide trainees with further training (such as small business development and grant management). Leonard Cheshire Disability also supports a youth empowerment project – the Young Voices – to support disabled youths. This has been particularly successful in Sierra Leone, raising the profile of youth with disabilities in the national parliament.<sup>26</sup> Achievements include the appointment of a young person with a disability to Sierra Leone's National Youth Commission; regular radio talk shows focusing on disability issues and the ratification of the UNCRRPD, making films about accessibility, education, and non-discrimination; and the development of a university grant programme specifically for students with disabilities.<sup>27</sup>

Another example of a successful programme incorporating youth with disabilities is that of Y-Care International (the international arm of the YMCA). Y-Care International aims to ensure that 20% of the beneficiaries of its livelihoods programme are youth with disabilities. Although a new programme, after the first year, vocational training had been provided to over 300 youths – 8% are youth with disabilities and of these,

---

<sup>24</sup> This is part of the Improved Social Inclusion and Increase Employment Opportunities for Disabled People in Sierra Leone Project (funded by the EU).

<sup>25</sup> Sponsored by Jersey overseas Aid Committee).

<sup>26</sup> <http://youngvoices.lcdisability.org/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://blog.soros.org/2011/12/young-people-with-disabilities-in-africa-challenge-the-status-quo/>

25% were in paid employment and 39% were self-employed.<sup>28</sup> (See Boxes 2 and 3 for some examples of the successes of this programme).

Box 2

Moses is 23 years old. He lived on the streets after his step-mother threw him out of the house after his father's death. He lived with other young people in the street, and was involved in petty crimes such as pick pocketing, although he also earns a living by providing labour services in the market places.

A friend told him about a radio jingle he had heard advertising the YMCA project. This friend was also Moses' chief and wanted a change in his life, so they both went to the YMCA project office.

Moses had always wanted to become an electrician. He undertook skills training in electrical installation at one of the well-known youth training centres.

After his training, Moses started working as an apprentice with an electrical contractor. He moves around on jobs with the contractor and receives stipends after each completed job. This is how Moses now earns a living.

The project has changed his life by helping him learn a skill. Now he has a career and is able to support his mother from his income.

Box 3 \*

Mariatu is 21 years old. She was born in a town near Magburaka. She lost her father when she was about 8 years old. Her father was killed by rebels who set their house on fire. Mariatu was trapped in the house, but her father managed to pull her out. She acquired her disability from the burns she sustained. Mariatu started street begging with her mother to earn a living when they were in a displaced persons camp. Her mother later returned to the village, but Mariatu stayed in Freetown where she lived on the street with other disabled persons. A worker from the Sierra Leone Union of Disabled Individuals (SLUDI) registered her with the union and she was recommended to the YMCA. Mariatu was supported to learn tailoring and dressmaking skills, and now makes a living making clothes. The income she earns helps her to meet the costs of her food and transport to school every day. She plans to earn enough to return to her village and join her mother. Mariatu says her life has changed a lot because she is no longer a beggar but a tailor. She wants to go back to her village where she will be useful.

Box 4

Kumba is 22 years-old and was born in Sokoria village, Koinadugu District. During the civil war, her village was attacked by RUF rebels. As she fled, she fell and dislocated her hip, which remained untreated. Though she later married and had a child, her husband abandoned her because of her disability. Kumba's parents are farmers and could not afford to support her and her child.

---

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication, Y-Care International. URL:  
<http://www.ycareinternational.org/1832/sierra-leone/supporting-youth-livelihoods.html>

Kumba recently graduated from the LCD livelihoods vocational training programme as a tailor. She was provided with start-up package to set up her own business, and no longer relies on her family to support herself and her child.

In addition to training programmes, there are a variety of other economic empowerment opportunities available in Sierra Leone, including microfinance initiatives which are directed at youth, but very few are specifically directed at persons with disabilities, though few have actually applied.

The lack of training and employment options for youth with disabilities is particularly of concern because the Government of Sierra Leone has made some progress in terms of disability equality. There is now a 'disability desk' in most ministries through which persons with disabilities can make their voices heard. However, there remains a lack of specific programmes for persons with disabilities within local council and national development plans and sector strategies. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology Education Sector Plan for 2007-2012 has, as a priority, increasing the number of vulnerable and disadvantaged children enrolling in schools. They hope to achieve this by ensuring that the schools can accommodate children with disabilities, making special needs materials and training available for teachers and by increasing social support and monitoring by social workers. However, as yet it is unclear how these plans to improve access to education will support the transition to employment.

Despite all these efforts, there is still a long way to go – the majority of youth with disabilities seeking employment in Sierra Leone lack support from their communities, face many barriers (including inaccessible transportation and infrastructure) and rely on support from already poor families, thus limiting their options for education and skills to prepare them for the workforce. However, this must be seen in the context of a country with limited formal employment opportunities for youth in general, so youth with disabilities will need to be specifically considered in mainstream programmes to ensure an equitable opportunity to obtain decent work.

### **3.3. China**

During the 1990s, China saw a decline in the youth population as the effects of the One Child Family Policy (1979) began to show. Youth in China are defined as those between 15 - 29 years old, and estimates in 2000 put the figure at 315 million (just over 25% of the total population at the time). However, census data demonstrates this figure has declined year on year (Xi et al 2006). Youth unemployment figures also show a reduction, though as the ILO note, this is in large part due to progress in getting youth into secondary and tertiary level education rather than employment. However, the overall level of education of young people is low, and the largest proportion of the unemployed are youths – in 2004, over 51% of youths in urban areas were unemployed (ILO 2004: 51). Nevertheless, despite the global economic downturn, youth in East Asia still have the highest probability of working (ILO 2011: 14).

As Eric Zhang notes, while the country's rapid progress in social and economic development and improvements in legislation, coupled with strong advocacy by



disability organisations, has led to an overall improvement in living conditions and social status, persons with disabilities still face numerous challenges (Zhang 2007). These include the large number of persons with disabilities who have never been to school (UN 2010: 65).

A national disability survey gave an official prevalence rate of 6.3%, or just over 80 million people (China National Disability Survey 2006). Of these, 4.8% were male and 3.8% female between 15-24 years. 75% of persons with disabilities in China live in rural areas, and there are different policies for urban and rural areas to reflect the differing needs of the two populations. These are outlined in the Chinese State Committee report to the UN Commission (2010); however, the report – in line with the CRPD itself – makes no mention of youth.

Overall responsibility for disability issues falls under the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Health, but the China Disabled Persons' Federation (CDPF) is in charge of social welfare services for all persons with disabilities. CDPF has national and local representation across the country, though there is no specific youth section. National policies, objectives and strategies on persons with disabilities are revised every five years. In the most recent Five-Year Plan, the focus is on improving the quality of life of persons with disabilities through rehabilitation, formal education, employment and construction of regional facilities.

China has a tripartite approach to disability employment, reflecting the approaches taken to promote youth employment generally (ILO 2004). These are: a compulsory quota of 1.5% in government agencies; encouraging private businesses to employ persons with disabilities with tax reduction incentives, and encouraging and supporting persons with disabilities into self-employment. This last has been one of the areas where the government and other agencies have worked successfully together, as the example below demonstrates (see box 5).

It is questionable to what extent quota systems are successful, but following the global financial crisis, the Chinese government increased incentives to employ graduates with disabilities through its 'Circular on Further Enhancing Employment of University Graduates with Disabilities'. This has meant that between 2009 and 2010, every one graduate with disabilities employed counted as two in the employment quota. According to the Committee report, employers who failed to meet the quota must contribute to a fund for promoting employment of persons with disabilities (although it is unclear how much this is enforced). State entities selected to employ persons with disabilities must have 25% of their full time positions held by persons with disabilities. Once they reach this number, they are given preferential tax breaks. In addition, increased guidance is being provided to university graduates with disabilities, who also are given priority in internships and subsidies for seeking jobs. (UN 2010: 45). Despite these positive policies, it is unclear how successful these initiatives have been.

Moreover, what about those youth with disabilities without further education qualifications? As noted above, the state provides mandatory vocational training. In 2008, 15,460 students with disabilities were attending vocational high schools, a reported increase of 52% since 2004. However, in 2009, only 1.5% of adults with disabilities had actually graduated from a vocational training institute (UN 2010: 65).

While over 40% of adults with disabilities have never been to school, education for children and youth is increasing through a combination of special education schools (total number 1,672), and 2,801 special education classes within mainstream schools. There is also state provision of vocational education and training institutions for persons with disabilities. Secondary-level vocational education institutions and occupational training institutions for persons with disabilities had trained 785,000 persons with different disabilities from different age groups – including youth – by 2009 (UN 2010: 39). It is not clear how many of these young people went on to employment, but according to the report, at the end of 2009 there were 22 million persons with disabilities in employment, 4.43 million of whom worked in urban areas and 17.57 million of whom worked in rural areas (although this is not disaggregated by age or impairment). According to UNESCAP, the overall employment rate of persons with disabilities in China is 85% (UNESCAP 2009). How many of these individuals are youth however is unknown. Moreover, while participation in a training scheme has the effect of lowering unemployment rates, it is unclear how many trainees actually make the transition to employment.

Leonard Cheshire Disability International has been working in partnership with CDPF to deliver skills training and livelihood opportunities persons with disabilities in urban and rural China (see boxes 5 and 6). An example of the diversity of employment options that can be successful introduced for disabled youth can be seen in the LCD programmes where skills taught range from embroidery or mushroom farming, to computer repairs and the establishment of micro enterprises through loans and grants.

**Box 5 Creating my own business to save my family**

Xiong Song is 24 years old and has spinal curvature. When he was 10 years old his father left, he believes because of his disability. Xiong's mother, who has been diagnosed with the same disease cared for him and supported him throughout his education, including at university. However, he was unable to find a job once he graduated from university. In 2006 through Leonard Cheshire Disability and the CDPF Xiong was able to take part in the Wuhan-Cheshire SIYB training workshop.<sup>29</sup> Through the training, he built his self-confidence and with the support of his mother, he launched a care home for elderly people, including those with disabilities, which provided 24-hour care services. He currently has 30 residents living in the home, all of whom need specialised intensive care. Though he finds the work very demanding, Xiong enjoys every day. He also saved his family – his father returned home and now supports our work together. He is proud that his business saved his family, and Xiong's entrepreneurial experience has taught him that you need direction: everything needs to be well planned and you should think before you jump. SIYB Training definitely helped Xiong a lot: it helped him to develop his confidence; construct a clear, sound business plan and implement good systems. His business is running well and provides him with a regular income. Xiong is looking to the future and developing some new plans in order to promote and improve his business prospects

**Box 6**

Wang Zhixiang is a 25-year old intellectually impaired man living in Gansu Province. He lives with his elderly parents, and farming is their main means of livelihood. Wang sold vegetables and eggs at the market to augment the meagre family income. Due to lack of market information and seed capital, he was unable to earn enough money for their daily needs and

<sup>29</sup> Start and Improve Your Own Business - an ILO backed initiative.

Wang decided to leave home and look for a job in Shanghai. He applied to more than 50 companies in two weeks for a job, but all employers turned him down. He became increasingly frustrated and depressed. After experiencing failure in both self-employment and waged jobs, he was desperate and tried to end up his life. Fortunately, the disability worker in his village learned what had happened to Wang in Shanghai and encouraged him to return and join the Rural Livelihood Resource Centre project. Wang completed both soft skills and small business training workshops, including poultry and rabbit farming. He was offered an apprenticeship and a start-up loan to set up his own small business. Wang is now much more optimistic and confident, and is paying back his loan and looking after his own and his family's future.

At first glance, China appears to have made significant improvements for youth with disabilities and expanding their opportunities for training and employment. However, it should be recognised that the compulsory education structure for children with disabilities, and the vocational training schemes available have not automatically translated into sustainable jobs. Moreover, there appears to be little formal support available for youth with disabilities once they enter the world of work – the incentives are geared to the employer, not the employee. Nevertheless, there are some very positive examples of cooperation between service delivery organisations and the CDPF, as the examples above clearly show.

### **3.4. Sri Lanka**

Sri Lanka too has made dramatic improvements to its socio-economic development, in particular benefitting from the end of the decades long civil conflict. It is now considered a middle income country. However, inclusion and employment of youth – and youth with disabilities in particular – remains a concern.

The Ministry of Labour Relations and Manpower in their review of Labour and Social Trends in Sri Lanka 2009, note that labour force participation and employment rates have fallen over the last decade, in part due to demographic changes (an increasingly aging population), but also to a drop in youth economic activity as young people (aged 15-24 years) are spending longer in education and are thus out of the labour force. Nevertheless, educated youth are overrepresented in the unemployed, in particular females. The report notes that the “the global economic downturn will depress the rate of new job creation, seriously affecting the job prospects of vulnerable groups, such as the young, the disabled, and those with lower human capital, as a result of repeated displacement caused by conflict.” (Ministry of Labour Relations and Manpower 2009: xi). But why these groups in particular?

Youth in Sri Lanka are defined as those ages 15-29 years, and currently total about one quarter of the population (Gunatilaka et al 2010: 243). Gunatilaka et al (2010) point out that this population has a high literacy rate, and although national unemployment levels have halved in the past decade, almost 80% of all unemployed were young people (Gunatilaka et al 2010: 1). Perhaps even more striking, a third of these have had at least 10 years of schooling. The majority are employed in agriculture or factory work. The report highlights a number of obstacles to obtaining work for youths, including poor English language skills, lack of entrepreneurship training, and negative attitudes toward self-employment and business ownership.

The report also identifies a number of steps that need to be taken to improve youth employability, including the need to continue improving schooling – in particular for poor and excluded children and youth, including children with disabilities (ibid: 13).

According to the 2001 Census, the disability prevalence rate for Sri Lanka was 274,711 (1.6% of the total population).<sup>30</sup> Over 31% of persons with disabilities did not go to school, with a higher rate for females. According to the census data, more than 73% of persons with disabilities were supported by family or relations, and again this rate was higher for females than males (GoSL 2001). A thorough exploration of the labour market, training and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Sri Lanka was undertaken in 2004 (Mendis 2004). This report outlines data, policy initiatives such as the National Policy on Disability for Sri Lanka, and other developments by the Employers' Network on Disability. This more recent data paints a slightly improved picture, with increased rates of completion of education in mainstream or special education, though successful transition to university is still a rare opportunity for youths with disabilities in a culture with significant rates of higher education (Mendis 2004: 42). Despite the Sri Lanka Compulsory Education Ordinance, which applies to all children equally, Ministry of Social Welfare (2003) statistics report that overall, 39% of persons with disabilities had never started schooling, and these statistics further varied by type of disability, ranging from 12% for persons with psychiatric disability, to 24% for those with a mobility disability, to 67% in the case of those with an intellectual disability (cited in YEN 2006: vii).

Sri Lanka's National Policy on Disabilities (July 2003) focuses on a range of poverty alleviation measures, including employment, vocational training and skills development, school education, non-formal education and higher education, though not all were fully operational at the time of the Mendis report (2004: 20). In addition to the disability policy, the Draft National Employment Policy for Sri Lanka (2002) also addresses the issue of employment of persons with disabilities through vocational training and guidance, job placement and employment services, awareness raising programmes and the encouragement of employers through the identification of "best practices" by the Ministry of Employment and Labour. Sri Lanka also operates a quota system, with three per cent of public sector jobs allocated to persons with disabilities – though this is qualified according to ability, and is neither targeted to any specific age group, nor apparently effectively implemented.

The Ministry of Social Welfare supports the National Council for Persons with Disabilities with the formulation of policies, legislation, regulations and work programmes. It also oversees the activities of both governmental and non-governmental organisations, including the provision of vocational training programmes, though increasingly it is the Ministry of Employment and Labour which is responsible for ensuring the mainstream employment of people with disabilities. Despite work being done to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the formal employment sector, including the "Employer Network on Disabilities,"<sup>31</sup> Mendis

---

<sup>30</sup>Information released to date indicates that overall disabilities prevalence per 10,000 was 162.9, with 189.9 for males and 136.4 for females. (Mendis 2004). However, this is considerably less than the most recent WHO Report (2011) which gives an estimation of 15% of any population have some kind of disability.

<sup>31</sup>Set up by the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, the largest employers' organization in Sri Lanka.

notes the lack of relationships between the Government and private sector training institutions, and the lack of involvement of trade unions in disability-related employment matters (ibid: 24).

The current system for formal vocational training, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Tertiary Education and Training, does not seem to have served youth with disabilities well. The Directory of Tertiary and Vocational Training (TEVT) Institutions lists 920 vocational training institutions in Sri Lanka. These include 556 in the public sector, 252 in the private sector and 112 in the NGO sector. However, no data is available on the number of students with disabilities served and only a small number of people with disabilities apply for, and are accepted by, mainstream training centres.

There are also some segregated work places providing vocational training to persons with disabilities. The Department of Social Services runs several such centres, and a small number are run by NGOs. Selection of trainees is made on the basis of the nature of the disabilities and the level of education, which given the limited access to education for persons with disabilities, may mean that many will not be eligible, especially females. The scale and scope of the different VTC courses ranged from three months to two years. However, there seems to have been little attempt to link the courses offered to market requirements, little in the way of career guidance for 18-29 year olds, and low placement rates in real jobs (Mendis 2004: 38).

Nevertheless, there are some good examples of successful initiatives, including the ILO's Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) Project.<sup>32</sup> Whilst not specifically targeting youth, it has trained persons with disabilities to set up a number of successful businesses (see Box 7 for example). Other successful examples cited by Mendis include the Asian Development Bank-supported Skills Development Project (2004: 44). However these initiatives are urban based, and the numbers participating were small. None are specifically geared to youth with disabilities.

The National Action Plan for Youth Employment, drafted by the Youth Employment Network (2006), calls for reduction in the discrimination and inequalities experienced by youth in the labour market and includes a call for inclusion of young people with disabilities. As the Action Plan notes, though the Constitution and Disabilities Act call for equal rights and non-discrimination in employment and education, "policy has not translated into practice in most sectors as there are no mechanisms to engage disabled persons in mainstream employment. This is of particular concern for young first-time job seekers with disabilities." (YEN 2006: viii).

The YEN report specifically identifies the need for specialised training institutions to be upgraded and modernised, and mainstream training institutions be adjusted to include training of persons with disabilities (for example, curriculum adjustment, training of trainers). The report also emphasises that preference should be given, where possible, to provision through mainstream institutions, with particular attention to self-employment. (YEN 2006: xi). The report also notes the need to develop

---

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.ilo.org/empent/units/start-and-improve-your-business/lang--en/index.htm>

stronger incentives, including conditional cash transfers to keep disabled children in school, reduced eligibility criteria, and the need for campaigns to improve attitudes toward disability as most of the problems with unemployment lie with the attitudes of others, not in the capacity of youth with disabilities themselves (YEN 2006: 10).

As in the other countries cited above, there are a number of small programmes underway across Sri Lanka, but no nationwide initiatives. These include those provided by NGOs such as Leonard Cheshire Disability, using a Resource Centre Model, where students are also trained by instructors with disabilities who bring both technical and personal experience to the role (see box 7).

#### **Box 7**

##### **Leonard Cheshire Disability Livelihood Resource Centre, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo**

This project is a partnership between LCD and the University of Colombo to support young adults with disabilities into mainstream employment and self-employment opportunities in Information Technology (IT). The IT Resource Centre was established in order to equip students with disabilities with necessary knowledge and skills for them to acquire better employment opportunities in the job market. By the end of the first year (2010), 48 undergraduates with disabilities received training. In addition, a visually impaired graduate (IT Specialist) was selected as the instructor by the University of Colombo.

##### **Leonard Cheshire Disability Livelihood Resource Centre, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo**

This partnership between the national Vocational Training Authority (VTA) and LCD offers skills training through a network of four National Vocational Training Institutes, 14 District Vocational Training Centres, six special Vocational Training Centres, and 199 Rural Vocational Training Centres. Training courses offered range from diplomas in Computer Application, Computer Graphics to Beauty, Culture and Hair Dressing for young adults with visual impairment and speech and hearing impairments. A speech and hearing impaired instructor teaches the Diploma course in Beauty Culture and Hair Dressing.

However, perhaps in response to some of the criticisms and gaps in its current policy, in October 2011, the Technical and Vocational Education Commission (TEVC), with support from the ILO, launched the 'National Strategy on Technical and Vocational Education and Training Provision for Vulnerable People in Sri Lanka,'<sup>33</sup> which targets six key groups including youth and persons with disabilities. It is as yet too early to tell how successful this policy will be but the initiative itself is encouraging and may offer a more coordinated nationwide approach to TVET for youths with disabilities, among others.

#### **4. Conclusions**

One of the most striking points on reviewing the limited data from the four (very different) countries presented here is how remarkably similar the issues and challenges raised for youth with disabilities are, and how similar the recommendations for action are. There is a need for concerted and coordinated

---

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.sundayobserver.lk/2011/10/23/fin10.asp>

efforts between all stakeholders to improve the skill sets and employment situation for youth with disabilities in developing countries.

The first sets of actions are at international and national levels: in all cases there is a need for adequate policy frameworks, supported by legislation which is enacted and enforced. One mechanism to foster this is to request or require ministries to present more disaggregated data – including age breakdown of quota system fulfilment. Reporting requirements are a condition of the Committee on the CRPD, but given the current lack of specific focus on youth within the Convention, States may be able to circumvent this. Such information would at least provide a baseline from which to understand, improve and evaluate the progress towards higher employment rates among youth with disabilities.

There are several other key pre-conditions that may be required in order to improve the current situation. The first is attitudinal – ranging from government officials through to employers, the education systems, parents and youth with disabilities themselves. It seems that one of the most effective ways to challenge this is through positive role models who challenge preconceived notions about the ability of persons with disabilities to work.

Another key point is that education programmes, skills training and other transitional mechanisms must consider specific needs of youth with different types of disabilities, rather than simply putting them together in the same generic category, with the same support needs, and same geographical location. For example, even where there were provisions for students with disabilities, it appears that the full range of impairments are often not considered, such as the need for sign language interpreters for deaf students, or accessible workshops for physically disabled youth. The issue of gender also needs further examination. Youth unemployment is often characterised as ‘male’ (especially issues around the problem of unemployed youth); however, the differences between employment and challenges for men and women are rarely mentioned, let alone addressed, in TVET programmes. It may also be worth reconsidering how ‘youth’ is defined. Whilst acknowledging the reasons why there may be a wide age range for those termed as ‘youth’ (for example to make up for opportunities lost because of conflict), is increasing the upper age limit of ‘youth’ to beyond 25 or 30 years old really that helpful to those who are just starting out in the world of work? Or does it in fact help government unemployment figures more than the youth themselves?

Cost is another factor, however better coordination between the government and service providers could anticipate and mitigate this barrier. Of equal importance, in none of the country examples given here is there a specific body set up to manage and coordinate the transition from education to employment, including the provision of programmes (such as mentoring, internships and apprenticeships). Programmes set up for adults may need to be more flexible when providing services to youth with disabilities.

A third and critical point is the need to match skills to demands of the labour market. This requires a more concerted effort to improve the image of TVET as ‘second best’ – from the donors who focus support on basic and primary education, and students, who perhaps understandably – prefer white collar, rather than agricultural or other

'blue collar' work. The examples from China show how fostering of a culture of entrepreneurship and self-employment can lead to job satisfaction and enhanced sense of well-being. There needs to be stronger support for such training, which must include social skills alongside managerial and technical skills necessary for success. Moreover, while there are few examples of microfinance schemes which specifically target persons with disabilities,<sup>34</sup> and even fewer of these schemes support youth interested in entrepreneurship and self-employment.

One factor that is crucial to successful transition from education to employment is the level of educational attainment and skills acquired. More innovative approaches are needed to ensure children and youth with disabilities enrol in and are retained in both formal and informal education. The report from Sri Lanka noted a number of necessary conditions to keep disabled youth in school, including subsidies for disadvantaged youth, relaxing enrolment criteria (including language requirements), increasing the number of short-term courses, as well as offering specifically targeting programmes to young women, disabled youth, and poor youth living in remote rural areas (Gunatilaka et al 2010: 15). Such approaches could be expanded to other youth identified as at risk of dropping out of school.

Finally educational and training programmes need to be linked to realistic employment opportunities. There is a need to improve the range and types of programmes offered through vocational training programmes and to ensure that instructors, equipment, and courses are up to date and relevant to the youth employment market. This includes far stronger links and coordination with other ministries (e.g. agriculture, finance and planning) to identify opportunities.

## 5. Policy Recommendations

1. Create mechanisms for cross ministry coordination. This could include a commission to develop a strategy on youth training and employment, with a specific focus on marginalised groups, such as youth with disabilities (as initiated in Sri Lanka), taking into consideration other factors such as gender. The international community and NGOs would all have a significant role to play in contributing to the commission, as would national Chambers of Commerce, employer forums, trade unions and other civil society organisations
2. Stronger links between education providers, TVET providers and business/employment sector, including incentives for apprenticeships that lead to employment and stronger links between TVET and local labour market requirements.
3. Greater understanding of the needs of youth with disabilities within education and TVET institutions. This could be facilitated by more coordinated approaches to working with DPOs and other disability service-providers.

---

<sup>34</sup> LCD partnered with Nofil in the Philippines in partnership in 2006 (<http://www.nofil.com.ph/>) See also Martinelli and Mersland (2010)



## References

Adams, A.V. 2007. *The Role of Youth Skills Development in the Transition to Work: A Global Review* World Bank: Washington

Betcherman, G. et al. (2007) *A review of interventions to support young workers: Findings of the youth employment inventory*, SP Discussion Paper, No.0715. (Washington, The World Bank). Available at: <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALPROTECTION/Resources/SP-Discussionpapers/Labor-Market-DP/0715.pdf>

Brewer L. 2004. Youth at risk: *The role of skills development in facilitating the transition to work*. Skills Working Paper No.19. Geneva:ILO

Buckup, S.2010. *The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work*. ILO Working paper  
Leading group of the second China national sample survey on disability,  
& National bureau of statistics of the People's Republic of China (2006) *Communique on major statistics of the second China national sample survey on disability*. Beijing: China 2006.

China (2010) *Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Initial reports submitted by States Parties under article 35 of the Convention. URL:  
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/Session6.aspx>

European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2002a) *Transition from School to Employment: Main problems, issues and options faced by students with special educational needs in 16 European countries*. Summary Report October 2002. URL:  
<http://www.european-agency.org/publications/ereports/transition-from-school-to-employment/Transition-en.pdf/view?searchterm=transition to work>

Freedman D.H.2008. *Improving skills and productivity of disadvantaged youth*. ILO Employment Sector Working Paper 7

Government of Kenya (2008). *Kenya National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (2007)*. Nairobi: Government Printer.

Government of Sri Lanka (2001) *Census*:  
<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/page.asp?page=Population and Housing>

Government of Sri Lanka (2011a) *Labour Force Survey 2010*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.

Government of Sri Lanka (2011b) *Report on the Regional Conference on Human Resource Development through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a development strategy in Asia*. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development.

<http://www.tvec.gov.lk/HRDAsiaConf/document/Abstract%20Book.pdf>

Groce, N. E. 2004. Adolescents and Youth With Disability: Issues and Challenges. *Asia Pacific Disability Rehabilitation Journal*. Vol.15(2) pp:13-32

Gunatilaka R, Mayer M and Vodopivec.M, Eds. (2010). *The Challenge of Youth Employment in Sri Lanka*. Washington: The World Bank

Heltberg, R. and M. Vodopivec (2008) Sri Lanka: Unemployment, Job Security, and Labour Market Reform. *The Peradeniya Journal of Economics*. Vol.2 Nos. 1 & 2

ILO (2010) Increasing the Employability of Disadvantaged Youth: Responding To The Impact Of The Financial And Economic Crisis. ILO: Geneva August 2010

ILO (2004) Country report about China's youth employment. URL:

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/region/asro/tokyo/conf/2004youth/downloads/china.pdf>

ILO Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Kenya

[http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_115097/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_115097/lang--en/index.htm)

Martinelli EW and Mersland R (2010) 'Microfinance for persons with disabilities' in Tanya Barron and Jabulani Ncube (Eds) *Poverty and Disability*. London: Leonard Cheshire Disability

Mbithi M and Mutuku M (2010) *Social protection status in developing countries: The case of Kenya*. Draft Paper prepared for ERD Regional Conference, on Promoting Resilience through Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa

Mendis, P. 2004. *Training and Employment of People with Disabilities: Sri Lanka 2003*. Bangkok: ILO.

Ministry of Labour Relations and Manpower (2009) *Labour and Social Trends in Sri Lanka 2009*

Mugo J, Oranga J and Singal N (2010) *Testing youth transitions in Kenya: Are young people with disabilities falling through the cracks?* RECOUP Working Paper 34:

[http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/WP34\\_MUGO\\_ORANGA\\_SINGAL\\_final.pdf](http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/WP34_MUGO_ORANGA_SINGAL_final.pdf)

Neyere, J. 2009. *Technical and Vocational Education and Training Sector Mapping in Kenya*. URL:

<http://schoklandtvvet.pbworks.com/f/Microsoft%2BWord%2B-%2BMapping%2Breport%2Bfinal-Nyerere%2Bmrt%2B09%2Bhp%2B2.pdf>

Tororei K (2009) The Right to Work: A Strategy For Addressing the Invisibility of Persons With Disability. *Disability Studies Quarterly* 29 (4)

Parmenter R (2011) *Promoting training and employment opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities: international experience*. International Labour Office, Employment Sector, Skills and Employability Department. - Geneva: ILO, 2011 1 v. (Employment working paper, No.103).  
[http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_emp/---ifp\\_skills/documents/publication/wcms\\_167316.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---ifp_skills/documents/publication/wcms_167316.pdf)

Trani JF with Bah O, Bailey N, Browne J, Groce N and Kett M (2009) *Disability in and Around Urban Areas of Sierra Leone*. London: Leonard Cheshire Disability.

UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), *Initial reports submitted by States Parties under article 35 of the Convention - China*, 8 February 2011, CRPD/C/CHN/1, available at:  
<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4efc32622.html> [accessed 7 January 2012]

UNDESA (2012) *BUILDING A BETTER TOMORROW: The voices of young people with disabilities*

UNESCAP (2009) *Disability at a glance 2009: A Profile of 36 Countries and Areas in Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok: UNESCAP.  
URL: [http://www.unescap.org/ESID/psis/disability/publications/glance/Disability\\_at\\_a\\_Glance2009.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/ESID/psis/disability/publications/glance/Disability_at_a_Glance2009.pdf)

UN HABITAT (2011) *State of the Urban Youth 2010/11: Levelling the Playing Field: Inequality of Youth Opportunity*

World Health Organisation and World Bank (2011) *World Report on Disability*. WHO: Geneva  
[http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf)

Xi J, Sun Y, Xiao J (2006) *Chinese Youth in Transition*. Ashgate Publishing

Youth Employment Network (YEN) Secretariat (2006) *National Action Plan for Youth Employment*.

Zhang E (2007) The Protection of Rights of People with Disabilities in China. *DisabilityWorld*. URL: [http://www.disabilityworld.org/01\\_07/china.shtml#37](http://www.disabilityworld.org/01_07/china.shtml#37)