



USAID Okard ໂອກາດ

Success Story

Fostering Inclusive Employment and Accessibility: Empowering Persons with Disabilities in Laos through the Disability Mainstreaming Advisory Service (DMAS)

There is a lack of awareness and understanding of disability generally, and not having experiences with a disability inclusive workforce can mean employers perceive persons with disabilities as less skilled than others and thus do not hire them. In addition, disability mainstreaming services are quite new in Laos, in particular, accessibility audits of physical facilities and infrastructure adaptations, so workplaces are more accessible for persons with disabilities. This impacts persons with disabilities' ability to work and the overall contributions to economic growth of the country.

The Disability Mainstreaming Advisory Service Center (DMAS Center), a local partner supported by the USAID Okard project that promotes the independence and functional ability of persons with disabilities through equal access to health and social services in Laos, has increased awareness among both private and public sector employers and institutions about the importance of inclusive employment and Universal Design where persons with disabilities can access facilities without any barriers. Through DMAS's support services, DMAS trained nearly 500 service providers on disability inclusive development and accessibility training and inclusion in the workplace and 98 organizations have been strengthened on the principles of disability inclusion and how to become more inclusive workplaces. DMAS has trained 137 (55% female) persons with disabilities for job readiness (for example, preparing a Curriculum Vitae (CV), interview techniques), of which 33 people (24%) have reported job placement and improved economic self-sufficiency. DMAS has also conducted accessibility audits for 29 organizations, including the Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) center in Houaphan, TVET in Savannakhet, Oxfam, and Association for Aid and Relief (AAR) Japan. As a specialist in Universal Design and accessibility, DMAS's support improved access to economic opportunities, quality rehabilitation, and social participation for all, particularly persons with disabilities, and contributed to the design and implementation of disability inclusive policies in Laos.

The members of DMAS gained valuable experiences through visits to various stakeholders working on disability inclusion in Laos and other countries. During their trip, they had the opportunity to attend the 15th Session of the Conference of the State Parties (CoSP) 2022 in New York City. There, they represented the voice of Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) from Laos by sharing the key activities of the OPD network in Laos. They emphasized the need for development partners to proactively engage with OPD representatives in promoting disability inclusive development. Additionally, DMAS visited V-Shesh in Chennai, India where they exchanged experiences and ideas on promoting inclusive employment. This visit aimed to improve access to employment for job seekers with disabilities.

As the journey of DMAS with USAID Okard draws to a close this quarter, it marks not an end, but a new beginning. DMAS emerges as a social entrepreneur who continues to work tirelessly to support, provide, and promote services towards disability inclusion. Their focus extends to preparing persons with disabilities for employment opportunities, getting them ready for their jobs, conducting accessible audits for buildings and facilities, and delivering training to both public

and private sectors on disability inclusion. This transition signifies a continuation of their commitment to fostering a more inclusive society.



- Photo 1:** DMAS visited H.E. Mr. Anouparb Vongnorkeo, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative of the Lao PDR to the UN - Photo credit: DMAS
- Photo 2:** DMAS represented the voice of OPD network at the 15th session of the Conference of the State Parties (CoSP) - Photo credit: DMAS
- Photo 3:** DMAS visited V-Shesh in Chennai city, India to exchange experiences on promoting inclusive employment and promote the access to employment for job seekers with disabilities - Photo credit: DMAS
- Photo 4:** DMAS supported the CBID Self Help Group on making ramp modification for the local community - Photo credit: ARMI