

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

**CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
AND PERSPECTIVES OF DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE:
A CASE STUDY OF THAI DISABILITY POLICY**

Naoko Ito*

ABSTRACT

The Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) took effect in May 2008, and the focus of this paper is on Article 23, which requires that there be international cooperation for the promotion of the CRPD in developing countries. A main research question here is how development assistance can be utilised to promote the rights of persons with disabilities in developing countries. In this connection, this research aims to explore the following issues: 1) the readiness of official donor agencies to assist developing countries in implementing the CRPD and 2) the expectations regarding this assistance held by Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) that represent persons with disabilities and/or their families in developing countries. Through literature review, official donor agencies of major developed countries such as the UK, Australia, and Japan were assessed for their readiness for future cooperation related to the CRPD in terms of their current development policy on disability and capacity to work with NGOs in the disability sector. Thailand was taken as a case study and representatives of four major NGOs working with persons with disabilities were interviewed.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which took effect in May 2008, is distinguished from other prior conventions of rights. The CRPD includes an article on international cooperation, reflecting the global discussions on the disparity between developed and developing countries. Indeed, the situation of persons with disabilities

in the global South has not yet been improved significantly enough, as issues of poverty, social exclusion and human rights violations are still overwhelming. CRPD Article 32 requires that there be international cooperation for the promotion of the CRPD in developing countries, with participation of persons with disabilities themselves being a key element of this cooperation. Once nation-states have ratified the CRPD, they will be obligated to engage in international cooperation as outlined in Article 32.

With this in mind, the key research question addressed here is how international cooperation can be effectively implemented in developing countries, so as to realise the CRPD's objectives. Thus, this research aims to explore the following issues: 1) the readiness of official donor agencies to assist developing countries in implementing the CRPD and 2) the expectations regarding this assistance, held by Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) that represent persons with disabilities and/or their families in developing countries. Using a qualitative social science research method, this research consists of a case study of a developing country and literature reviews. Thailand was selected as the case study, and the representatives of four major NGOs working with persons with disabilities were interviewed. Also, official donor agencies of three developed countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and Japan, were chosen, and their development policies on disability were studied through their reports and other relevant documents.

This research was conducted at an opportune time, since Australia and Thailand ratified the CRPD in July 2008. Although there is diversity in developing countries in terms of geography, culture, religion, politics and economy, this Thai case study may facilitate an insight into effective international cooperation for the CRPD. On the one hand, the majority of Thai persons with disabilities still confront typical issues such as poverty that people of developing countries face. On the other hand, the representatives of Thai NGOs researched here have been internationally examined and hold a mature view towards disability and development issues, which other developing countries can learn from. In fact, more NGOs including organizations of persons with disabilities are well established, and their representatives actively participating in the formation of national policy on disability in Thailand, than most other developing countries. It is hoped that this research can be beneficial for NGOs working with persons with disabilities in Thailand and other developing countries, enhancing their understanding of official donor agencies for an effective mutual collaboration in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background to CRPD Article 32: Poverty and Social Exclusions of Persons with Disabilities in Developing Countries

Recently, more attention has been paid to the existence of persons with disabilities among the poor people in developing countries. The World Bank and other international organisations claim that persons with disabilities are the poorest of the poor (1). According to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (2), approximately 160 million persons with disabilities (over 40 percent of the total number of persons with disabilities) in the Asia-Pacific region are living in poverty. In addition, malnutrition and poor sanitation are causes of impairments for an estimated 100 million people in developing countries (3).

An impairment is a functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory damage. In a recent approach to disability, called the social model of disability, a “disability” can be defined as a loss or reduction of opportunities to take part in the everyday life of the community on an equal level (4). In this manner, for example, when a person has an impairment and his/her income-generating opportunities are reduced due to reasons associated with the impairment, that is to a “disability”, the person may experience financial poverty.

The social model of disability is related to the broader concept of social exclusion. Social exclusion is a dynamic process with a multidimensional framework of social disadvantage, focusing on relational features (5). Thus, “social exclusion” helps to clearly understand the relationship between poverty and disability. Persons with disabilities in developing countries experience various forms of social exclusion including: 1) exclusion from formal/informal education and employment, 2) limited social contact, 3) low expectations from the community and him/herself, 4) exclusion from the political/legal process, 5) exclusion from basic health care, 6) the lowest priority for any limited resources (e.g., food, clean water, inheritance), especially in poor families and communities, and 7) lack of support for the high costs directly associated with the impairment (e.g., expensive medical treatment) (4). All of these factors deprive persons with disabilities of income-generating opportunities, thus placing them, in the absence of state support, in income poverty. Similarly, poor people, who are deprived of healthcare and healthy food, may suffer from malnutrition and poor health, resulting in an

impairment. In addition, since poor people have limited access to education, they are often exploited and sent to work in hazardous conditions, which increases their risk of accidents and physical impairment. “Poverty and disability are mutually reinforcing, as persons with disabilities are socially excluded and adequate social services are not provided” (2). Also, a vicious cycle exists between disability and poverty, and such a cycle is often observed in developing countries (6). In order to stop this vicious cycle, persons with disabilities must be fully included in all the development efforts of their countries, and such a development approach should be comprehensive in order to deal with various forms of social exclusion.

The CRPD Article 32 and Relevant Arguments

Owing to the increasing international awareness of disability issues in developing countries as mentioned earlier, Article 32 was negotiated in a series of CRPD preparatory meetings. Inclusion of this Article was controversial since, “traditionally such conventions have made only brief references to the concept of international cooperation” (7). However, Article 32 states:

1. States Parties recognise the importance of international cooperation and its promotion, in support of national efforts for the realisation of the purpose and objectives of the present Convention, and will undertake appropriate and effective measures in this regard, between and among States and, as appropriate, in partnership with relevant international and regional organisations and civil society, in particular organisations of persons with disabilities. Such measures could include, inter alia:
 - (a) Ensuring that international cooperation, including international development programmes, is inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities;
 - (b) Facilitating and supporting capacity-building, including through the exchange and sharing of information, experiences, training programmes and best practices;
 - (c) Facilitating cooperation in research and access to scientific and technical knowledge;
 - (d) Providing, as appropriate, technical and economic assistance, including by facilitating access to and sharing of accessible and assistive technologies, and through the transfer of technologies.
2. The provisions of this article are without prejudice to the obligations of each State Party to fulfil its obligations under the present Convention.

The reasons why it was possible to incorporate this article in a Convention are explained as follows (7). Firstly, disability is a major cross-cutting development issue and requires strong partnership and cooperation of various stakeholders. Secondly, international cooperation must be inclusive of disability issues, otherwise it might lead to the inadvertent creation of long-term barriers for persons with disabilities. Therefore, exceptionally one separate article on international cooperation is inserted into the CRPD, which must be respected and implemented by various development partners on disability.

Since 2001, when the process to draft the CRPD began, the rights-based approach has been increasingly emphasised in development cooperation on disability. For example, in 2002, a set of policy guidelines for the United Nations Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (2003-2012) was adopted as “Biwako Millennium Framework for Action to Promote an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific”. In the Framework, against the traditional charity-based approach, the rights-based approach is strongly recommended for application in national disability policies and aid programmes on disability in the Asia-Pacific region (2). The rights-based approach ensures that persons with disabilities enjoy all the entitlements which other citizens enjoy.

Compared to western welfare states, developing countries appear to have a shorter history and less solid foundation to facilitate the notion of rights, in particular social rights, as well as social policy. For example, after World War II, the notion of human rights was transferred to developing countries, most of which had been formerly colonised, through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948. With the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, social rights, or in other words, people’s right to live better, became more widely known. Moreover, the Declaration of the Right to Development of 1986 facilitated more developing countries in becoming aware of people’s right to participate in social development. Along with economic growth since the 1980s, social policy has been promoted as a form of social development in many developing countries (8), and it is also observed in Thailand.

While human rights instruments promote the quality of life of people in developing countries, it is argued that the Declaration of the Right to Development tends to make the government’s role ambiguous as to whether development would be better ensured by individual nation-states or the UN and international NGOs (9). In fact, it is a serious issue for some developing

countries that the main body for promoting social policy related to persons with disabilities and providing relevant services has been international aid organisations, not the national government or civil society. In this regard, Article 32 clarifies that international cooperation is “in support of national efforts for the realisation of the purpose and objectives of the present Convention”.

Major Official Donor Agencies’ Development Policy on Disability

Since academic literature on international cooperation on disability is quite limited, relevant reports and web-sites of official donor agencies were utilised as important evidence for this research. According to the information obtained, the UK, Australia and Japan have been engaged in international development programmes on disability for decades and have established policies on development cooperation on disability. These three countries identify and use a) disability-specific and 2) disability-inclusive approaches in their policies and programmes.

Among official donor agencies, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has been playing a leading role in development cooperation on disability, by emphasising the vicious cycle of disability and poverty (6) and by the empowerment of persons with disabilities in close collaboration with NGOs (10, 11). Stating that “reducing poverty by tackling social exclusion is a DFID’s policy” and “disability is about discrimination and exclusion – key aspects of DFID’s work –” (10), DFID is committed to address issues of disability in its development programmes throughout the world.

Recently, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) has also endeavoured to “establish Australian leadership on disability” (12). Currently, disability is one of the fourteen aid themes upon which AusAID focuses, according to its official web-site (<http://www.ausaid.gov.au> as of August 2009). AusAID has organised a taskforce consisting of NGOs and other stakeholders since early 2008 in order to develop a new disability strategy for the Australian aid programme for 2009-2014, titled “Development for All”. One of the core goals of the strategy is effective international leadership on disability and development,

and the strategy is in alignment with CRPD Article 23 (13). In fact, Australia's ratification of the CRPD in July 2008 was the fastest among OECD countries. According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the government is going to increase the entire Official Development Assistance (ODA) to 0.5 percent of the gross national income (GNI) by 2015-16, and assistance to help the most vulnerable citizens, including persons with disabilities, will be expanded (12).

It is assumed that since the headquarters or branches of prominent international NGOs are located in the UK and Australia, DFID and AusAID have more chances to engage in dialogue and collaborate with these NGOs, and their rights-based empowerment approach has influenced the policy and programmes of DFID and AusAID.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) also developed its policy paper on "support for PWDs" in 2003 in cooperation with relevant Japanese experts and NGO representatives (14). In the paper, both disability-inclusive and disability-specific programmes are regarded as important, and JICA's assistance has become directed in this "twin-track". JICA annually dispatches hundreds of Japanese volunteers and professionals of special education, physio-therapy, vocational training, etc. to both governmental and non-governmental organisations for technical cooperation, and has assisted a number of disability-related projects conducted by the governments of developing countries. It appears, however, that the rights-based perspective and empowerment of persons with disabilities are embodied only in a few projects supported by JICA (e.g., the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability project from 2002 to the present). Moreover, since JICA's scheme to fund the activities of NGOs is quite limited, its collaboration with international and local NGOs seems much smaller compared with DFID and AusAID.

International development cooperation on disability must be organised with a comprehensive view in cooperation with various stakeholders. Taking this point into account, major official donor agencies currently endeavour to incorporate disability into their development programmes and apply the right-based approach. In this regard, these agencies' international cooperation is already in alignment with the CRPD Article 32.

THAILAND'S POLICY, ISSUES, INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION CONCERNING THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Disability and Poverty in Thailand

The population of Thailand is approximately 62 million, with about 10 percent of the people (5.7 million) living in the capital city of Bangkok. The National Statistical Office's Disability Survey in 2002 found that 1.7% of the people (consisting of 1.8% male and 0.9% female) had disabilities, according to the definition of disability in the Thai Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act of 1991. According to the survey, the incidence among the rural population was double that of the urban population. The Northeast (2.4 percent), the South (1.9 percent), and the North (1.8 percent) had higher percentages of disability, while Bangkok and the Central region had 0.7 percent and 1 percent, respectively (15). These statistics show that the majority of the poor live in rural regions, and more persons with disabilities reside in these poor regions than in the central regions.

Legal Instruments and Government Agencies to Support Thai Persons with Disabilities

Since 2007, the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act has been enforced, taking over the Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons Act of 1991 and allied Ministerial Regulations, which previously had been the main legal instruments. The Rehabilitation Act of 1991 set the foundation for the rights of persons with disabilities to receive public services and other Acts also have entailed entitlements for persons with disabilities. For example, the Social Security Act provides registered persons with disabilities a subsistence allowance of 500 baht (approximately US\$15) per month, and the National Education Act protects the rights of persons with disabilities to obtain education. However, the subsistence allowance and other support tend to be quite minimum and residual, compared to the current standard of living (e.g., the daily minimum wage stipulated of 2007 is 120 baht) in Thailand.

The Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) is primarily responsible for the implementation of the Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act of 2007. The National Office for Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities has been established under the MSDHS and works in partnership with other relevant government agencies and NGOs.

Although the quality and quantity of services for persons with disabilities are not so advanced when compared to those in developed countries, these Acts ensure that Thai persons with disabilities have the right to receive medical, rehabilitative, and educational services, as well as employment support and financial assistance. As a condition to receive these services, a person needs to be registered at their nearest Public Welfare Office, with a medical diagnosis of his/her impairment. District Public Welfare Offices and Health Centers provide services directly to persons with disabilities, and Provincial Special Education Centers are in charge of educational services for children with disabilities.

Thai Government's Position on the CRPD

Recently, a more proactive position on human rights has been presented by the Thai government. For instance, the Thai diplomatic mission states that: "The country has progressively striven to promote human rights awareness through human rights education and to strengthen legal frameworks to promote and protect human rights in line with UN Conventions, in particular with regard to the rights of vulnerable groups" (16). Furthermore, "Thailand has a long-standing commitment to enhancing cooperation to uplift the quality of life of women, children and persons with disabilities as well as to ensure their rights" (16). In fact, the Thai official delegation, headed by a blind person, actively participated in drafting the CRPD, and Thailand's ratification of the CRPD was one of the earliest in Asia. When Thailand was the ASEAN Chair, it strongly promoted the establishment of an ASEAN Human Rights Body, which will be a regional mechanism to promote and protect human rights in Southeast Asia (16). Although an ASEAN Human Rights Body has not been realised yet, the Thai government, with support of the disability community, may continue to push for it.

The Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act of 2007 is distinguished as the first Thai law to prohibit discriminatory and unfair acts against persons with disabilities and to punitively impose the penalties on a discriminator with intention or severe carelessness. Also, the Act has expanded the entitlements for Thai persons with disabilities and explained these entitlements in more detail. Overall, the Thai government has demonstrated its support for the CRPD by modifying the domestic legislation to be fit for the CRPD.

**Thai NGO Leaders' Perspectives on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:
Interviews with Representatives of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities
and their Families**

In order to collect qualitative data for this case study, four representatives of major Thai NGOs from the disability sector were interviewed at their offices or private places in Bangkok on different dates in October 2008. These four NGOs were the Thailand Association of the Blind (TAB), the Redemptorist Foundation for People with Disabilities, the National Association of the Deaf in Thailand (NADT) and the Association of Parents for Thai Persons with Autism under the Thai Autism Foundation. These NGOs represent persons with disabilities and/or their families. These NGOs were chosen because of their wide range of activities and influence on Thai disability policy. Disability diversity was also taken into account in the selection of four interviewees, such as those who have a different (physical, visual, hearing, intellectual) impairment or have a disabled family member. Each interview was semi-structured with prepared questions, lasted for less than one hour and was tape-recorded. All the interviews were organised in English except one interview which was conducted through Thai sign language interpreted verbally in English.

INTERVIEW RESULTS

**Perceived Current Situation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
in Thailand**

All four respondents acknowledge that the rights of Thai persons with disabilities have been promoted and protected further by the newly-implemented persons with disabilities. Empowerment Act, compared to the past. Three respondents emphasise that the Empowerment Act is an advanced legal tool in terms of penalising discrimination against persons with disabilities, and a lot of progress has been made in legal and policy development within the last few years in Thailand. The four interviewees agree that despite an active disability movement at the national level and recent policy advancements, the situation of persons with disabilities in the rural areas has not yet been much improved. All the interviewees show their strong concerns about an increasing gap between urban and rural persons with disabilities, in particular, poverty and various social exclusions of the latter.

A deaf representative and the parent of an autistic child point out that many persons with disabilities are still excluded from education and employment. They emphasise the lack of employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the private sector due to employers' deficient understanding and support. Also, the quality of education and other relevant services for persons with disabilities requires further improvement in Thailand; especially, these services should meet more individual needs.

Furthermore, according to a deaf interviewee, the deaf face various social disadvantages due to lack of communication and information accessibility; for example, many deaf persons are infected with HIV/AIDS due to insufficient knowledge of it, and some deaf people are unfairly treated in legal cases, as they cannot explain the situation clearly without proper sign language interpretation provided, or due to their limited command of sign language. There was a similar observation about persons with intellectual disabilities in Thailand: since the majority of them have not yet received support for their self-advocacy, they tend to be exploited without being able to express their wishes and own opinions. Young women with disabilities such as girls with hearing impairments or intellectual disabilities are extremely vulnerable and socially isolated without sufficient education, and easily become victims of various exploitations.

Key Issues to Promote the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Thailand

While the recent establishment of the CRPD and the Thai Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act are appreciated, one respondent also critically asserts, "if we just say that disabled persons have rights... and rights are important, unfortunately it may not bring about real positive changes for disabled persons at the grass-root level in Thailand and other developing countries". He continues to comment that as the notion of rights is too abstract for the majority of persons with disabilities who are deprived of educational opportunities in the Third World, the CRPD promotion there should use simple terms/questions related to the daily needs of persons with disabilities, for example, "Do you want to go to school like other brothers and sisters?" or "Would you like to work?"

All the interviewees suggest that more local leaders with disabilities need to be developed and equipped with knowledge of the rights of persons with disabilities as well as with a commitment to protect those rights. In fact, all four of the interviewees' organisations have

been actively engaged in the development of their provincial branches and sub-district level self-help groups, and in the leadership training of these local leaders with disabilities and families. According to two respondents, local leaders with disabilities can serve for the empowerment of other persons with disabilities in their community; they can also operate as liaison to their local authority in order to promote the need to empower persons with disabilities in the community, negotiate their rights and educate local non-disabled people on disability issues. As of October 2008, the Redemptorist Foundation has a network of 8,000 local leaders with physical disabilities who are graduates of the Redemptorist Vocational School for the Disabled, and the Thailand Association of the Blind has supported the establishment of 40 registered associations of the blind at the provincial level.

Every one of the four interviewees is critical of the limited understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities in the Thai public sphere, and about barriers within the government for the implementation of the Thai Persons with Disabilities Empowerment Act and promotion of the CRPD. According to one, the barriers include an inadequate understanding of the rights-based approach and prevailing charity-based thoughts among officials. Another argues that policies adopted by the central government are hardly conveyed to provincial governments properly, thus the quite limited understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities at the local level. Three respondents emphasise the need to raise awareness through public education.

Vision for the Thai Disability Policy in the Future

According to one respondent, the Thai disability policy seems to step forward “in the right direction”, following the international movement towards the rights-based approach. Further, he describes the current Thai situation: “we are in the transitional period to the right-based society, but still far away and need some time to achieve it”. Another respondent mentions that the recent Thai disability policy and newly established laws might be “too advanced” in regard to the real situation of persons with disabilities and the government’s implementation capacity. According to all the interviewees, the Thai disability policy needs further assessment in terms of its actual implementation. In particular, it is emphasised that the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation are so important but currently lacking, and that NGOs should be further involved in such monitoring and evaluation in the future.

The respondents observe that while the Thai NGOs and their representatives with disabilities have recently enjoyed very high involvement in the national policy formation compared to the past as well as neighboring developing countries, “the quality and level of the participation” should be enhanced further. Some elite persons with disabilities are invited to participate at the national level, while very few persons with disabilities are involved at the provincial level and then only in a small number of local programmes. More grass-root self-help groups and local leaders with disabilities should build their capacity and participate in the policy formation and implementation of programmes at the provincial level. The participation of deaf leaders in the policy formation is limited so far and the majority of deaf persons have not completed primary education, and available sign language interpretation is so limited in Thailand.

All the interviewees consider that more efforts should be made for empowering persons with disabilities in the rural areas, as they are seriously concerned about the widening gap of the situation of persons with disabilities between Bangkok and other areas. As a strategy, they recommend that the implementation of Thai disability policy be further decentralised in the future, by encouraging provincial action-planning and allocating a larger budget to the provincial programmes.

Expectations regarding International Cooperation in Alignment with the CRPD

While one respondent suggests that international donor agencies should have a scheme to directly fund the activities of persons with disabilities and their NGOs, another suggested that the donor agencies use their positional advantages to advise and encourage the authority of developing countries for building a rights-based society.

While none of the interviewees expect that Thailand will receive large international financial support for improving its disability issues, they say that persons with disabilities in Thailand, as in other developing countries, may need technical cooperation from developed countries in terms of human resource development and information exchange. One respondent emphasises the effectiveness of technical cooperation by disabled leaders (e.g., deaf leaders) for improving the issues of specific disability groups (e.g., deaf community), while he also values non-disabled experts who respect the empowerment of persons with disabilities and make tangible contributions to it.

Interestingly, all the interviewees have shared their concerns about the situation of the rights of persons with disabilities in other developing countries. According to the four representatives interviewed, their NGOs have engaged in international cooperative activities or have the capacity for future activities to help promote the CRPD in neighbouring developing countries. There is the possibility of the sub-regional cooperation to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities, and ASEAN can play a central role.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Appropriate and Effective Measures to Support National Efforts for the CRPD

According to policy documents presented, the UK, Australia, and Japan have made great efforts to develop appropriate and effective measures to support developing countries' national endeavours to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. Especially after ratifying the CRPD, Australia is enthusiastic about further international development cooperation on disability with effective strategies and larger budgets. Despite being categorised as a developing country, Thailand is also keen and capable of international cooperation with neighboring developing countries.

Partnership with Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, other NGOs and Civil Society

Prior to the enforcement of the CRPD, DFID has been closely working with NGOs from the disability sector, in particular organizations of persons with disabilities, in the UK as well as in developing countries. As every policy statement emphasises partnership with persons with disabilities and other various stakeholders, DFID's development programmes have become more disability-specific and disability-inclusive. Thanks to such collaboration, DFID's programmes are also enriched. In the same direction, AusAID is currently developing its cooperative programmes. While JICA has clung to government-to-government bilateral cooperation during the past decades, it currently endeavours to involve a wider range of stakeholders, including NGOs for and of persons with disabilities, in its relevant policy formation and programme implementation. As seen in the Thai case study, official donor agencies are expected to further collaborate with NGOs including organisations of persons with disabilities,

and such collaboration can be a key to success in international cooperation for the CRPD. Also, partnership at the macro-level, including regional/sub-regional (e.g., ASEAN) cooperation, would be effective in the promotion of the CRPD.

Disability-inclusive Development Cooperative Programmes

As identified through the literature review, as well as pointed out by the Thai leaders interviewed, the majority of persons with disabilities in developing countries live in poverty and experience various social exclusions. Particularly, persons with disabilities in rural communities suffer serious exclusions from health, education, and employment opportunities, and “voice-less persons with disabilities”, such as deaf persons, persons with intellectual disabilities and young women with disabilities, are very often exploited. In this regard, international development programmes need to be more inclusive of and accessible to persons with disabilities so that they can enjoy the benefits from development as other non-disabled citizens do. As far as DFID, AusAID and JICA are concerned, they present their commitment to disability-inclusive policy along with the implementation of disability-specific programmes. Since other international donor agencies also implement various programmes related to health, education, gender, infrastructure, community and rural development, their policies to incorporate the issue of disability into their development cooperative programmes should have a huge impact.

Capacity Building of Stakeholders

According to the interview results, Thai NGOs expect international cooperation for the capacity building of local leaders with disabilities and their self-help groups/organizations so that they can become advocates of rights at the community level. Also, public education of the CRPD is considered necessary. Moreover, representatives of Thai NGOs consider it useful that people from developed countries, in particular disabled leaders, share relevant information, knowledge and experiences with persons with disabilities in developing countries. In fact, DFID has a long history of providing this kind of assistance by funding British NGOs to work with persons with disabilities and their self-help groups in the Third World for their capacity building. AusAID and JICA also assist in disability-related capacity building through training programmes conducted locally in developing countries and internationally in their home countries (Australia, Japan).

CONCLUSION

Although it took 5 years to draft the CRPD, the drafting process has already promoted basic awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities in the global South and influenced their disability policy formation. Thailand is one of such developing nation-states, having established an anti-discrimination law for persons with disabilities and having already ratified the CRPD. The CRPD Article 32 on international cooperation clearly states that international cooperation is needed to support national efforts. In other words, a nation's government, along with NGOs and civil society, has the prime responsibility to promote and protect the rights of its citizens with disabilities through international cooperation. Among these stakeholders, organisations of persons with disabilities and other relevant NGOs seem most active and have already initiated rights promotion through their local networks. As seen in Thailand, trained and motivated grass-root leaders with disabilities have great potential in facilitating and realising the objectives of the CRPD at the community level.

International donor agencies of the UK, Australia and Japan have been engaged in development assistance for persons with disabilities for years, and their current assistance has been rights-based. Recognising the relationship between poverty and disability, these agencies endeavour to include persons with disabilities in their international development programmes. Furthermore, their partnership with organisations of persons with disabilities and other NGOs is increasing, so as to enrich programmes of these agencies. Therefore, it can be concluded that major donor agencies discussed in this research are ready for the implementation of CRPD Article 32 although they might be required for a continuous strong commitment for the effective implementation.

*Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Expert
JICA Philippine Office, 40th Floor, Yuchengco Tower,
6819 Ayala Ave. Makati City 1200, Philippines
Direct Tel/Fax: +63(0) 2 932 3389
Email: naoko1024@gmail.com

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