

## From a blind girl, to a teacher

Today is International Day of People with Disability.

People with disability are the world's largest and most disadvantaged segment of the population, accounting for around 15 per cent of the global population (1 billion people). Collectively, people with disability around the world have poorer health outcomes, lower educational achievements, less economic participation and higher rates of poverty than people without disability.



*With the support from her father, Sone is enjoying a new walking frame that is supported by the project.*

Sone is a four year-old girl who has problems walking and has a visual impairment – she was born totally blind. When she was born, her parents named her Bord, “blind girl”. It was common practice in the village to give people with disability a name related to their impairment.

Some members of Sone's village attended Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) training, aimed at empowering people with disability and their communities.

Participants learned that calling people by their impairment does not recognise that they have dignity, value and ability. Participants communicated this to Sone's parents and the family decided to change their daughter's name to Sone, “to teach”. Sone's parents also joined the CBR workshop. Initially they were very shy but by the third day they were very active and motivated, sharing their experiences of having a child with disability.

Sone's mother, Borne, said CBR training made her family feel more part of the

community. Before she felt like an outcast because of her child. Through the CBR training, she saw that “disabilities are normal, they exist everywhere, and disabled people can be productive members of the community”.

Sone now has a walking frame which she likes very much. Her father said “I am happy with the assistive device as it helps my child. Sometimes she falls down and I help her. Most of the time her sister helps and plays with her.” Her father has levelled and cleared the ground around the house. Sone is now learning to walk.

The Australian Government is committed to supporting people with disabilities, like Sone, to improve the quality of their lives through access to the same opportunities for equal participation, contribution, decision making and economic wellbeing as other people. In Lao PDR, Australia supports ‘Right to Learn: An Inclusive Approach to Education’ project,

through the Catholic Relief Service, targeting children with disabilities in all 40 villages of Xaibouathong, Khammouan.

The Right to Learn project works with communities to include children with disabilities in their local primary schools. The project trains teachers, parents and community members in rehabilitation techniques and provides assistive devices to people with disability. The project mobilises Village Education Development Committees to raise awareness and support the community to break down misunderstandings and negative attitudes, and promote active participation of children within their homes, at school and in community life.

I look forward to a day when international day for people with disability is redundant, when all people with disability are treated with equal dignity and opportunity.

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