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Living with Disability in Lao PDR

Key points:

- **Poverty and disability reinforce each other and contribute to vulnerability and exclusion**
- **Poor people with disabilities face the greatest challenges in accessing healthcare, education and employment**

People with disabilities across the world experience many similar challenges. In lower-middle income countries like the Lao PDR these challenges are especially pronounced as a consequence of poverty, low standards of services such as healthcare and transport, and the lack of inclusive education and vocational training, which, in turn, limit employment opportunities. Poverty also means that many disabled people live in housing unsuited to their needs.

Access to healthcare, basic services, assistance and support: Knowledge of basic health issues for most people with disabilities in Lao PDR, especially in remote villages, is very poor, and access to health care is difficult and often too expensive to access. In addition, many people with disabilities know little, if anything, of the services available for them and assistance available to access these services.

Progress towards inclusive education for all children with disabilities: In 2003, UNICEF

reported that over 1,600 children with a variety of disabilities had access to education through an inclusive education policy in 200 schools. Between 2015 and 2019, an Australian aid sponsored program, Basic Education Quality and Access (BEQUAL) aims to increase participation of students with disabilities, improve learning environments and the availability of quality education in 66 of the most educationally disadvantaged districts.

Employment: In the Lao PDR, an estimated 75% of people with disabilities are of working age. However, income generation and job security are significant issues. People with disabilities are less likely to be employed, and likely to be paid less for the same work. Lack of education and skills means that a person with disabilities is less employable. Negative attitudes, particularly about productivity, and lack of access to transport and buildings, create major challenges for people with disabilities in securing employment.

Negative stereotypes and social stigma towards people with disabilities are common in the Lao PDR and people with disabilities typically have a lower social status.