



# Scaling-up Inclusive Employment Interventions in Cambodia



**PAFID**  
People's Action for Inclusive Development



**LIGHT**  
FOR THE WORLD

Disability can affect each and every one of us. Yet despite all the global initiatives we have a long way to go to achieve the realisation of equal access to services, legal structures and opportunities for all. All of us, including persons with disabilities have the right to realise our dreams, hopes and aspirations, and to feel a sense of belonging. As a society we need to accept the challenge to grow the potential of us all to be valued, productive and contributing members of society. Unless we make an effort to include all, we will inherently exclude.

Most studies tell us that 15% of any population are people with disabilities and that this equates to one billion people worldwide. I get tired of reading such statistics and feel they can often mask the truth and realities of discrimination and structural oppression faced by many poor people, including those with disability. The fact is that the world can benefit from the potential socio-economic, cultural and political contributions of everyone, including persons with disabilities. The advantages of including all makes for a richer and more prosperous social and political economy; the language of 'leave no one behind' is easy to say, but more understanding of the systemic and institutional structures that embed the invisibility of marginalised people is needed. Questioning our own assumptions becomes more poignant when we realise that these easily become the stereotypes that inform prejudice.

Disability and poverty are of course closely linked. There is a higher disability prevalence in lower-income countries than in higher income countries. People from the poorest wealth quintile, women and older people, have a higher prevalence of disability<sup>1</sup>. From 97 epidemiological studies conducted in low and middle income countries, 80% report a link between poverty and disability. The results of a systematic review provides a robust empirical basis to support the disability-poverty cycle<sup>2</sup>.

It is not a surprise that disabled people's organisations in developing countries often mention access to livelihood opportunities as their first priority and negative and discriminatory attitudes as their biggest barrier. Addressing both these can break the vicious cycle of poverty amongst persons with disabilities and contribute to unleashing their full potential.

Light for the World aims to support and empower people with disabilities to make their own living. We want to remove the barriers that prohibit their equal participation in economic development. Article 27 of the UNCRPD on Work and Employment and article 28 on adequate standard of living are our guiding principles on this.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization and World Bank. (2011). World Report on Disability. Pg 262.

<sup>2</sup> Morgan Banks, L. & Polack, S. (2014). The Economic Costs of Exclusion and Gains of Inclusion of People with Disabilities: Evidence from Low and Middle Income Countries. London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, CBM & ICED.

**Article 27**

States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps.

**Article 28**

States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living for themselves and their families, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions, and shall take appropriate steps to safeguard and promote the realization of this right without discrimination on the basis of disability.

Involvement in economic development means much more than gaining access to income: it also has a very positive impact on social inclusion. When persons with disabilities are able to generate their own income, their status in the household and the community improves and their self-esteem and empowerment get a natural boost.

“Now that I have the job, I am so proud when I leave early in the morning and come back at the end of the day. Words are not enough to describe how I feel. I notice that I have started looking at people; and they look at me. We communicate. It is different...For me this job is not even about the money, it is about the mind. I can now socialize with other people...”

*Participant of Light for the World's EmployAble programme.*

Light for the World is working throughout the world on ensuring that persons with disabilities gain access to work and income – working on both employer and employee readiness to come together in a way that works for all parties involved. For example, in Rwanda, Cambodia, Mozambique, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan we partner with vocational training centers, apprenticeship providers and employers to support them in becoming inclusive for young students with disabilities. We have launched Make12.4%Work – an initiative which triggers the private, public and development sector to open up employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in Uganda. This includes training young persons with disabilities to act as Disability Inclusion Facilitators to support employers.

In Cambodia, Light for the World has been working in numerous partnerships in recent years in promoting equal and accessible employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. We hosted a series of meetings in 5 provinces under the banner of ‘inclusive business development’ and have tailored responses to each of the identified needs from the provinces. So far, we have worked in Battambang, Pursat, Kampot, Kampong Speu and Phnom Penh. Each meeting brought out a varied and different set of needs. In Phnom Penh the discussions focused very much around the need to provide a bridge between job

seekers and employers. To encourage job seekers to be job ready and to start to look at the supported employment environment for employers as much as employees. This led to our current partnership with Essential Personnel Cambodia and the project to develop skilled job coaches. These coaches act as the bridge between job seekers and employers. After working in this space for a while, we identified some common issues and themes and wanted to explore them in more depth. This is why we commissioned this research to delve more into the issues around scaling up Inclusive Employment Interventions in Cambodia. This largely qualitative research took place in July 2018 and is based largely on the views of persons with disabilities and employers themselves. Their voices will largely inform our future plans in working in this area.

I am therefore delighted to introduce this research report on 'Scaling up Inclusive Employment Interventions in Cambodia!'

*David Curtis, Disability Inclusion Advisor, Light for the World Cambodia*



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# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In Cambodia, as is the case worldwide, young people and adults with disabilities experience significant discrimination, stigma and exclusion when seeking employment - particularly young women, rural residents and those with more severe impairments (Jones et al, 2018; Gartrell et al, 2016, Bailey and Nguon, 2015; World Health Organization and World Bank, 2011). Interventions to enhance people with disabilities' access to employment in Cambodia have largely focused on people with disabilities themselves, with little attention given to employer attitudes, experiences and needs (Gartrell et al, 2016). This report presents findings from a study designed to offer insights into the barriers that hinder employers from employing people with disabilities, and to identify employer perspectives on the changes needed to open up more job opportunities to young people and adults with disabilities. Findings from this study will inform Light for the World's ongoing inclusive employment activities, refine the project intervention methodology and provide strategic orientation for future programming in inclusive employment.

## **Study objectives**

This study had three main objectives:

1. to provide an overview of the current situation regarding employment for people with disabilities;
2. to provide practical insight into what needs to change at the level of employers to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities, and
3. to identify how Light for the World can most effectively affect change.

## **Methodology**

A total of 31 people participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews as part of this study: nine employers,<sup>3</sup> ten people with disabilities,<sup>4</sup> and twelve representatives from NGOs working on employment programs in the disability sector.<sup>5</sup> An interview checklist was used. Interviews with employers and representatives from NGOs and international organisations were conducted in English. The focus group discussion and two interviews with women with disabilities were conducted in Khmer with the assistance of an NGO staff member who acted as an interpreter. All interviews took place in July 2018. Extensive notes were taken during all interviews and the focus group discussion. These notes were read multiple times and analysed thematically. National and international literature on how young people and adults with disabilities transition between education and employment, inclusive formal and non-formal training, technical vocational education and training (TVET) systems and apprenticeship programs were examined.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, current and projected trends in

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<sup>3</sup> Smart, Fashion House, Amit, Digital Data Divide, Wat Than Artisans, Amit, Hotel Frangipani Hotel, Ta Phrom; AEON Mall.

<sup>4</sup> Three women with hearing impairments, three women with mobility impairments, two men with physical impairments participated in a focus group discussion. Another two women with mobility impairments participated in one-on-one interviews.

<sup>5</sup> Organisations interviewed included Water Aid, Association for Blind Cambodians, Cambodian Disabled People's Organisation, Essential Personnel Cambodia, UNDP, WHO, Krousar Thmey, Battambang Disabled People's Organisation, DDSP, Pursat and Agile Development Group.

<sup>6</sup> The literature reviewed built on and updated previous research on disability and employment in Cambodia, see Gartrell et al, 2016. It drew upon the most up-to-date evidence on effective programming in inclusive employment available and was not a systematic review of all available literature.

Cambodian economic growth, labour market needs and skills gaps were analysed, as these form the broader context into which inclusive employment initiatives must sit.

### Employer needs and readiness to employ job seekers with disability

To date, disability employment programs have focused on people with disabilities themselves – the supply side of the employment equation, with little attention given to understanding employer needs and concerns – the demand side, let alone exploration of how best to meet these. Just as people with disabilities need to be ‘job ready,’ employers need to be ‘employment ready’ and workplaces need preparation for successful job matching (Murfitt et al, 2017; Waterhouse, 2010). Potential employment placements for job seekers with disability depend upon the implementation of demand-side supports that build employer capacity and confidence with practical steps that can be taken to make their businesses and workplaces welcoming and accessible. These steps can be taken prior to the point of employing job seekers with disability and lay the foundational elements needed for successful and sustained employment.

Preparing employers to be ‘employment ready’ requires targeted support that provides them with the practical skills, knowledge and confidence they need to be able to create inclusive workplaces that welcome and retain employees with and without disabilities. This study found that the ‘employment readiness’ of employers and business owners – that is their level of disability confidence (see Box 1 below) and knowledge of how to find, recruit, train, support and retain people with disabilities as valued employees in their businesses, is mixed. Findings indicate that employer readiness can be categorized into three broad groups:

1. **The Ambassadors**

Employers who employ people with the required skills and ability including job seekers with disabilities. These employers need employees with the relevant hard and soft skills to meet work requirements and actively recruit people with disabilities.

2. **The Inclusives**

Employers who are motivated to employ people with disabilities by a sense of social responsibility and the desire to help people with disabilities through employment. These employers would benefit from practical tools and guidance on how to be inclusive in ways that challenge dominant social norms and low expectations of people with disabilities and how to actively recruit employees with disabilities. These employers may require greater understanding and support to be able to see the full potential of people with disabilities and to employ because of skills and abilities rather than feelings of pity and notions of help.

3. **The Uninitiated**

Employers who are not yet employing people with disabilities and equate disability with inability. The Uninitiated are reluctant to engage people with disabilities in their business because they are concerned it will negatively impact profitability, social image and reputation. These employers need greater exposure to disability.



**Box 1: Employer Disability Confidence**

1. Employers who know how to make adjustments to the workplace to retain employees who acquire a disability;
2. Employers who know how to make changes to recruitment processes to allow skilled and talented job seekers with disabilities to compete on a level playing field; and
3. Employers who deliver accessible customer service that provides a great experience to customers who may have a disability (Murfitt et al, 2016).

International experience shows that an effective way to address employers' diverse needs is through the provision of targeted support using an outreach model (Murfitt et al, 2017). Trialing of an inclusive employment outreach model in Cambodia is an appropriate next step. Building disability confidence through the development of trusted employer to employer networks where those employers such as the Ambassadors share their positive experiences, skills and knowledge with the Inclusives and Uninitiated, is an important part of an inclusive employment outreach model.

Critical to the success of an inclusive employment outreach model is the provision of direct, tailored and flexible support to businesses to build their disability confidence and workplace inclusion by addressing what is important to them. The development of supports targeted to the needs, concerns and characteristics of the three employer groups identified and the development of an employer tool box is required. Such tools may include how-to guides on:

- 'disability friendly checks' regarding physical access and inclusive workplace cultures;
- disability awareness including training and job carving;
- inclusive recruitment processes and policies;
- appropriate language that is disability friendly;
- the financial case for inclusion and the cost of lack of diversity in the workplace;
- business and labour market analysis.

Other tools could include:

- case studies, regular updates and face-to-face and digital/online opportunities to continually build disability confidence;
- business breakfasts and networking opportunities focused on specific issues of interest to employers such as employee retention, conflict resolution, effective management practices, communication and customer service;<sup>7</sup>
- customised 'road maps' with practical recommendations to build more confidence and inclusion in specific workplaces;
- connections with peer businesses, employment service providers and disability focused/aligned organisations who could assist businesses to implement their objectives, and

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<sup>7</sup> These specific issues were identified by employers in interviews undertaken as part of this study.

- business trainings in disability awareness and capacity building, accessibility checking, one-on-one conversations about specific needs and challenges, and sessions on unconscious bias, including experiential opportunities (mock interviews) and customised recommendations to businesses.

### People with disabilities are ‘job ready’

Young people and adults with disabilities face particular barriers to education, training and employment. Building their inclusion in all spheres of social life and particularly in employment means ‘starting with us’ – young people and adults with disabilities themselves – their aspirations, hopes and dreams. This study found that leadership programs for women with disabilities are an effective way to build the soft skills and inner resources such as confidence, determination and courage required to first know, and to then achieve their goals and aspirations. Additionally, women with disabilities develop close relationships with one another that endure beyond the leadership program and provide women with an ongoing source of emotional support and encouragement. These soft skills, personal and social supports are the foundation of people with disabilities job readiness and expansion of such leadership and advocacy programs is required.

### A job coach model where the ‘job ready’ and ‘employment ready’ are matched

Findings from this study suggest that to address employer needs and to match this with job seekers, a job coach model or disability inclusion facilitator model is appropriate. In-country piloting of job coaches who job match is already showing positive results. Job coaches play the role of ‘trusted broker’ who support job seekers to get job ready, to transition into employment and to support employers to get employment ready (see Gartrell et al, 2016). Job coaches develop individual support plans for job seekers and:

- teach job seekers how to look for and find jobs;
- build their soft skills;
- support them with CV and letter writing;
- assist them to find real work trials;
- link them with potential employers;
- advocate on their behalf, and
- follow up after work placements.

Employers interviewed in this study felt that without support of an NGO it would be difficult for their needs and the goals of inclusive employment to be met. Employers and people with disabilities support a one stop shop approach where job seekers can go to meet their job coach who provides them with tailored and on-going support in the pre-employment, transition to, and follow-up post-employment phases. Job coaches also build the ‘employment readiness’ of employers through customized support packages tailored to their needs and delivered to them in an outreach service model. A significant role of the job coach is to establish organisation level relationships with CEO’s, managers and other decision-makers such as Board members, to secure their engagement and support for inclusive initiatives. Working with key organisational and business decision-makers has been shown to have the greatest likelihood of success as interventions are lead and supported from the top (Murfitt et al, 2017).

International experience highlights the importance of solid transition planning to support young people and adults with disabilities as they move through formal and informal education and other programs into work. Real work experience in the industry and in roles

job seekers with disabilities aspire to work in are a critical stepping stone into employment. Job coaches, sometimes called disability inclusion facilitators, can play a key role in the design of these placements, preparation of job seekers and employers for such placements and post-placement follow-up.

This study has identified that there is a lack of appropriately trained and skilled job coaches in Cambodia. Part of the challenge is to retain job coaches once they have been appropriately trained, mentored and supported to develop the requisite skill sets, and reflects the broader challenge to retain employees that many employers in Cambodia experience. To date, employers have not rewarded employee loyalty, and low salary levels mean that employees are continually seeking higher wages elsewhere. People with disabilities are recognized as committed employees who tend to stay in one workplace for longer than those without disabilities, and they must be part of an inclusive national employee retention strategy.

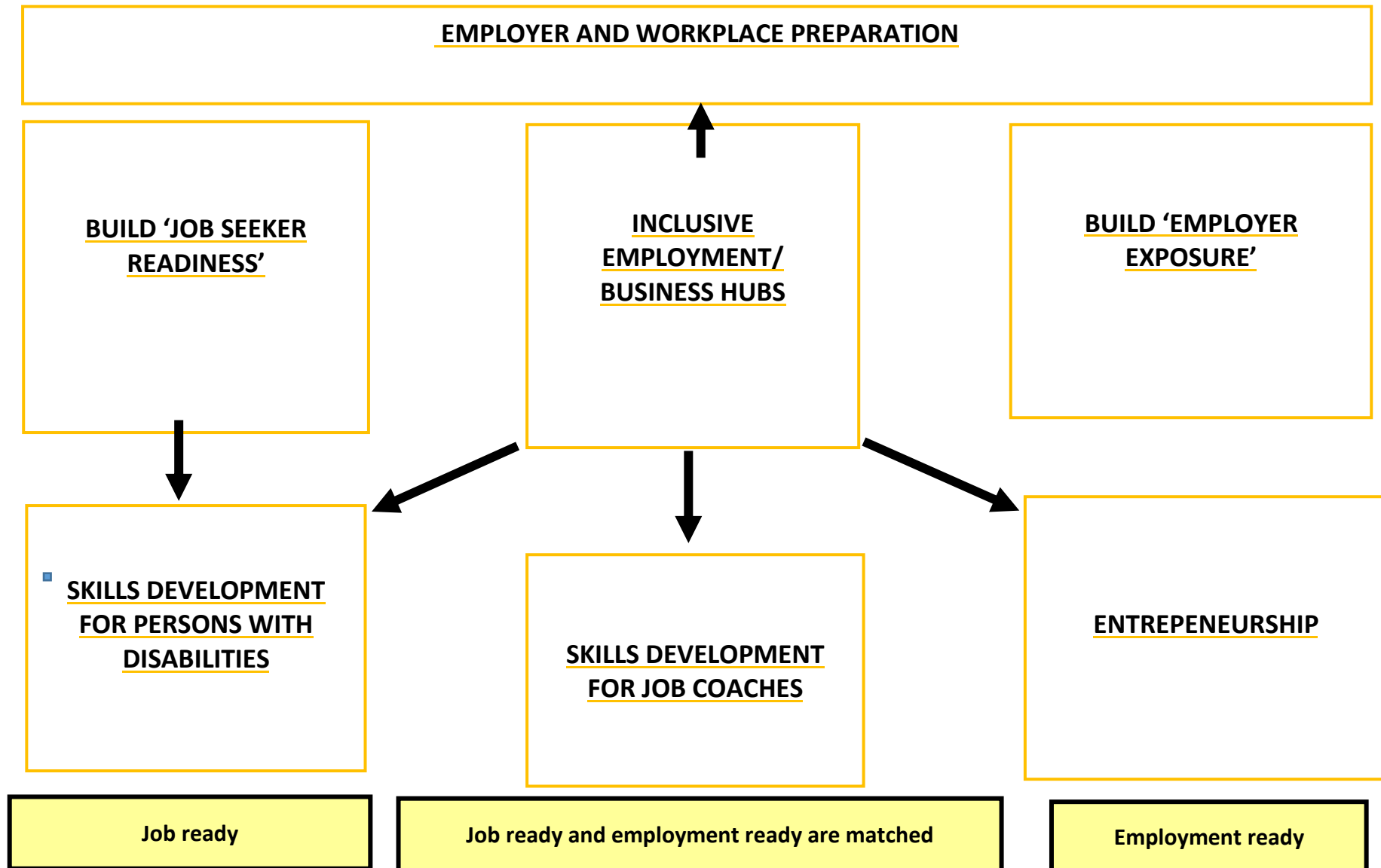
### **An inclusive employment outreach model positioned within labour market needs and skills gaps**

First and foremost, employers want employees with both hard and soft skills to fulfil the required work tasks and to contribute to their businesses and workplaces. Presently in Cambodia however, there is a mismatch between a workforce with low levels of skills and a labour market that requires vocational and technical skills (ADB & ILO, 2015). Consequently, employers experience skill gaps with large numbers of hard-to-fill vacancies. Among professional staff there are gaps in analytical and problem solving skills and among unskilled workers in work attitude (ILO & CAMFEB, 2008). Although most businesses provide on-the-job-training, high staff turnover undermines these efforts. There are few rewards for employee loyalty and wage levels alone are an inadequate incentive to retain staff. Tapping into a more diverse pool of potential employees as part of a broader national workforce skills development program is required. People with disabilities need to be specifically targeted as an untapped group of employees who demonstrate high levels of workplace commitment. Simultaneously, employers need to develop inclusive employee recruitment and retention strategies that build supportive workplaces that sustained employee loyalty.

An inclusive employment outreach model is the most appropriate approach to build employers and workplaces that are ready to employ job seekers with disability, and are able to retain them as valued employees. An inclusive employment outreach model where job coaches actively match job seekers with disabilities, their skills sets and aspirations with employer needs is a relatively new approach to disability employment in Cambodia, and needs to be part of broader conversations around human resource development and improved access for young people – with and without disabilities – to education, tertiary, technical and vocational training and ultimately to employment. There is increasing demand in the Cambodian labour market for more skilled and committed employees. Skills gaps are already evident (ADB & ILO, 2015), and will be an ongoing issue that requires a long-term, systems level approach to improve access to, and the length of time spent at school and in tertiary education and training. In the short to medium term however, better employment outcomes for young people with disabilities hinges on appropriate supports that address their own and employer needs, and links them into real work experiences as a transitional step into employment. An inclusive employment outreach model that builds

employer and job seeker readiness alongside mainstreaming inclusion into broader youth employment and livelihood initiatives is the recommended pathway for Light for the World to scale-up inclusive employment interventions in Cambodia.

## An inclusive employment model in Cambodia



## **BACKGROUND**

*“I want to change the way people think about disability...I do not need their pity...I want them to see my value and knowledge and achievements... they have enough food and I want enough food too, they have a moto and I want a moto too...they have a job and I want a job too...with the same salary as others...”*

*(Young man with a mobility impairment)*

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has a solid rights-based and inclusive policy framework that promotes access to decent work for persons with disabilities. In 2009, the Government adopted the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of People with Disabilities, [hereon The Law] (RGC, 2009), and ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012. The RGC also adopted a quota system of employment for persons with disabilities (RGC, n.d). These Government commitments and policy frameworks indicate that the RCG is increasingly accountable for the employment of people with disabilities. As an interviewee explained:

*“[The] government is giving the green light to NGOs in the disability sector ...the door is open...the government is increasing its attention on disability...”*

*(LNGO representative)*

### **Box 2: The Quota System of Employment for Persons with Disabilities**

The Sub-Decree on the Quota System for Recruitment of Disabled Persons states that:

“Ministries and/or State institutions with a total number of more than 50 staff (civil staff and employees) must include or have 2 per cent of qualified and capable disabled persons who are qualified for a position and capable of doing their functions, performing their roles and responsibilities” (Article 5) (RCG, n.d).

“Legal entity that have a total number of more than 100 workers, employees must include or have 1 per cent qualified and capable disabled persons who are qualified for a position and capable of doing their functions, performing their roles and responsibilities” (Article 6), (RCG, n.d).

### **Cambodian economic transformation and the labour market**

To increase opportunities for decent work for men and women, youth and adults with disabilities in Cambodia, understanding the nature and structure of the labour force and current and potential employment opportunities is required. In the last two decades Cambodia has grown rapidly with an annual growth rate at over 8 per cent since 2000 (CDRI, 2013). The economy has transformed from being agriculturally-based towards industries and services (ADB & ILO, 2015). Four main sectors - garment manufacturing,



tourism, construction and agriculture have driven the transformation of the economy (CDRI, 2013). To sustain longer term growth however, economic diversification beyond these four sectors is required, and a wider and different range of skills, including better skills from the workforce, is needed. Furthermore, better relations between employers and employees are necessary to ensure a stable foundation for industrial development and diversification (ADB & ILO, 2015:iii). Inclusive employment initiatives must align with these macro level structural changes that shape labour market needs, current and future skill requirements and employment opportunities. It makes strategic and pragmatic sense for inclusive disability employment programs to be cognizant of these underlying growth and development needs.

Most Cambodian workers are concentrated in a small number of sectors which reflects the narrow sectoral basis of economic growth and the focus on low-skilled production models in garment and tourism sectors (ADB & ILO, 2015). In 2001, the agricultural sector employed more than 70 per cent of the population and by 2013, this had fallen to just below 50 per cent, with industry employing 20 per cent and services the remaining 30 per cent (ibid:28). Employers account for a very small fraction of the employed population with formal employment concentrated in public services. As the proportion of paid employees is increasing alongside the expansion of manufacturing and tourism, so too is employee protection. In 2013, more than 19 per cent were employed in the industrial sector in rural areas (ibid).<sup>8</sup>

The vast majority of non-agricultural employment is informal and most Khmers work in informal enterprises (ibid:19). The Labour Force Survey (RGC, 2012) estimates that 2.39 million Khmers were employed in agriculture, 0.5 million in formal employment and 4.3 million in informal employment, meaning that 9 out of 10 positions in non-agricultural employment are informal (ADB & ILO, 2015:34). Micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) are a major source of employment opportunities and in the absence of better alternatives they are used as a livelihood and economic option of last resort (ibid). MSMEs account for 73 per cent of total employment in non-agricultural establishments, whereas only 23 per cent of total employment is associated with large establishments (RGC, 2011). To date, few studies have examined employment in MSMEs in Cambodia even though they play a critical role in bridging the economic gap between rural and urban areas, and drive rural economies (Pandya, 2012). People with disabilities, particularly women, choose to establish MSMEs as this work is home based, has few barriers to entry, little capital requirements and can be combined with home-based responsibilities.

Inclusive employment interventions can target these sectoral patterns of employment which demonstrate the overriding importance of the informal sector, MSMEs and the limited but growing number of formal sector opportunities. The majority of employment opportunities for people with disabilities will replicate these patterns which means that access to business development support, training and capital are critical. Whilst the labour market increasingly demands vocational and technical skills, the combination of schooling and learning gaps underpin the persistence of low skills levels particularly for people with disabilities. Addressing this leaning and skills needs requires multi-sector medium to long-term strategies.

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<sup>8</sup> Agricultural employment has fallen in rural areas and because of the much larger numbers of workers in rural areas, the absolute number of people moving into industrial employment in rural areas far exceeds the number moving to Phnom Penh (ADB & ILO, 2015:30).

## Skills gaps in the Cambodian workforce

The rapid and ongoing structural transformation of the Cambodia economy underpins the skill sets the workforce needs to attain if current and future growth, development and poverty alleviation are to be sustained. At present, Cambodia's workforce is poorly educated and has relatively low skills that do not match employer needs (ADB & ILO, 2015:i; CDRI, 2013). Low education undermines economic participation and greatly contributes to the economic marginalisation of men and women with and without disabilities alike (AusAID, 2012; Connelly, 2009). School enrolment rates for children with disabilities are half those of children without disabilities, and in the long term means they are less competitive as employees (Kalyanpur, 2011; 2014).

In the last decade primary school enrolment has significantly risen to 98 per cent suggesting that the country has achieved near universal primary education (World Bank, 2014). The primary school drop-out rate however, is high (53 per cent) and the mean years of school across the population is just 4.7 years (UNDP, HDI Report, 2016). Of children of official primary school ages 7 per cent are out of school. Approximately 5 per cent of youth have no formal education and 27 per cent of youth have attained at most incomplete primary education, meaning that 32 per cent of 15-24 year olds have not completed primary education (World Bank, 2014). Moreover, nearly 43 per cent of female youth of secondary school age are out of school compared to 36 per cent of male youth of the same age with the biggest disparities seen between the poorest and the richest (ibid). In 2009, less than 2 per cent of youth aged between 20 and 24 years received a TVET certificate (World Bank 2012); the percentage of certificate holders with disabilities is unknown and is likely to be even less.

Skills shortages are already apparent (Khieng, Madhur and Rethy, 2015; CDRI, 2013) and evident in the high number of hard-to-fill vacancies (ADB & ILO, 2015:47; CDRI, 2013). A third of companies who participated in a survey of 500 establishments conducted by the National Employment Agency (NEA) in six sectors<sup>9</sup> attributed these vacancies to a lack of required skills among applicants (ADB & ILO, 2015:47). The Cambodian Federation of Employers and Business Association (CAMFEBA) found that 89 per cent of employers were dissatisfied with the skills possessed by youth (ILO & CAMFEBA, 2008).<sup>10</sup> Analytical and decision-making skills were noted to be lacking among professional staff, and work attitude was the most frequently identified issue for employers of unskilled workers (ibid).

To cope with current skills gaps companies provide on-the-job-training and/or recruit skilled employees through building relationships with specific universities and institutes. Almost all large employers invest in some form of training for their employees, with the majority providing this in-house (BDLink and HRInc Cambodia, 2012). The acquisition of job-related skills and training may be most effectively gained at the workplace, a precondition for which is a sufficient level of basic skills – including soft skills – to secure work in the first place, and then to absorb further training (Kanol, Khemarin and Elder, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> The six sectors included food and beverage; garment, apparel, and footwear; rubber and plastic; construction; financial services and insurance; and accommodation.

<sup>10</sup> Of all respondents in a survey conducted by ILO and CAMFEBA, over three-quarters of respondents noted that youths lack some skills required for their jobs.

Skills gaps are indicative of the persistent funding, capacity and coordination issues in the education and technical, vocational education and training (TVET) systems. Available data demonstrate persistent low levels of government investment into education and TVET institutions. Since the early 1990s, Cambodia has spent an average of only 2 per cent of its education expenditure on higher education (CDRI, 2013). In 2010, 13.1 per cent of total government budget expenditure was allocated to education, and although it rose to 17.1 per cent in 2015, it remains the lowest in the region.<sup>11</sup> In 2015, spending on TVET was a mere 0.7 per cent of total government expenditure, and 0.1 per cent of GDP (ADB & ILO, 2015:40).

In addition to low budget allocations, there are significant institutional challenges to building human capital through the various institutions that provide TVET and non-formal training including coordination – with 11 government ministries involved in higher education – quality control and skills recognition (ADB & ILO, 2015:41; CDRI, 2013; UNDP, 2011).<sup>12</sup> Many formal and informal TVET providers have weak links with employers and are not registered with the government (ADB & ILO, 2015:47-48). In the absence of comprehensive up-to-date information an accurate assessment of Cambodia's TVET system is difficult (ibid:48). Similarly, there is a lack of systematic data on enterprise-based training, including apprenticeship programs (ibid). While there has been more demand for vocational and technical workers, TVET entities are unable to provide sufficient graduates with the required skills (CDRI, 2013). Young people with disabilities' access to mainstream TVET and apprenticeship programs is largely undocumented.

As CDRI (2013) note, a policy of incentives for post-basic education graduates to go to TVET and high school graduates to choose science disciplines is needed promptly. Access to higher education should be expanded but must ensure quality and relevance through the selection process, strengthening policy on science, regulation and coordination and building research capacity. Asian industrialisation experience signifies refinement of public universities and TVET institutes to consolidate focus and resources for human capital development (ibid).

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<sup>11</sup> The region here refers to Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. In 2012, education expenditure in Cambodia exceeded 3 per cent of GDP and falls below those of other ASEAN nations. Thailand for example spends 4.9 per cent of GDP on education and Vietnam was as high as 6.3 per cent in 2010 (ADB & ILO, 2015:40-41).

<sup>12</sup> Institutions providing training include line ministries, formal and non-formal enterprises (such as via apprenticeships) and NGOs.

# **FINDINGS**

## **1. People with disabilities need to be ‘Job ready’**

### **Build foundational soft skills and job readiness through ‘start with us’ leadership and advocacy**

The aspirations of young people and adults with disabilities are diverse. The young women and men who participated in this study aspire to run their own businesses, to work in community, to help children with disabilities go to school, to establish chicken raising businesses, to work in coffee shops, to create a foundation for deaf people and to teach others how to use computers. Young people and adults with disabilities however, encounter many difficulties when seeking opportunities to work. Typically, young people and adults with disabilities have low levels of, or no, education, few skills and little, if any experience of finding a job (Bailey and Nguon, 2015; Jones et al, 2018). Young women may have spent years restricted to home by the protective love of their family, faced persistent low expectations and questions asking why they would even want to go outside, to school or to work. They may have problems with transportation and little, if any money to search for a job, even if they knew where to go to and who to ask. They may have experienced repeated knock-backs, put downs and rejections by employers who simply ‘*went silent*’ and never replied to their job applications and phone calls. They may feel ‘*disappointed, depressed and emotional*’, ‘*hopeless*’ and ‘*helpless*’.<sup>13</sup>

The young people and adults with disabilities who participated in this study explained that change must start with them and begins with their own commitment to try for themselves, to work hard and to have a dream and goals. Young people with disabilities value coming together with one another because ‘*we understand each other...and it makes it easier if we come together.*’ Together they learn and support one another, and those with more experience act as role models for others. This starting point mobilises young people and adults with disabilities themselves and begins the process of strengthening their ‘soft skills’ – the attitude, mindset, self-confidence, decision-making and communication skills that employers look for. Establishing a strong foundation within and between young people with disabilities themselves exposes them to new ideas and opportunities, provides them with a space to explore their capacities, dreams and aspirations, to set their own employment and life goals, and to engage in the various types of support that they may need to enter and stay in the workforce.

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<sup>13</sup> Quotes in italics are the words used by the young men and women who participated in this study.

### Box 3: 'Starts with us' leadership and advocacy

Young women with disabilities found that their own inner motivation to drive change in themselves, together with the support and encouragement of others enabled them to expand their lives and take steps to achieve their aspirations. They initiated change by starting with themselves.

Chenda, a young woman with a mobility impairment, was motivated by her own drive to change social attitudes towards her:

*"My neighbours looked down at me when I was young...my family was poor and my father was an alcoholic...to make my neighbours stop this, I studied hard... I had no plan but I had a dream... so I studied hard and wanted to go to university. I did not know how to get from school to university but I pushed...I married and I got a job....my goal was to change my neighbours' attitude through education...they do not look down at me anymore. I started with myself...[I] motivated myself."*

(Chenda)

Srey Mom<sup>1</sup>, a 27 year old wheelchair user, never left her house for 27 years. In this time, she taught herself to read and write, and with the support of an organisation she joined workshops, made friends and eventually got a job:

*"My mother did not allow me to study at school...I knew very few places outside of my home...my mother worried about me...my brothers did not allow me to join a group for women with disabilities...I felt upset and disappointed...I had no schooling and no experience of finding a job...I felt hopeless. My parents were afraid someone might say something to me and [that] I would cry...an organisation came to my house and gave me a card and explained a lot of things to me...I really wanted a wheelchair and after waiting for two years, I got one. Whilst I waited, I went to a lot of trainings and workshops and made friends and more friends...they saw me change very quickly and now I have a job and drive a moto. I was scared [driving the moto] at first because I did not know the roads and [I] had never been out alone."*

(Srey Mom)

Mobilisation of young people with disabilities through leadership programs that are linked to inclusive employment initiatives and centered on supporting people with disabilities to achieve their employment aspirations is the starting point. Building upon an already successful program that has considerable knowledge and experience embedded within it, as well as a pre-existing social support network makes sense. The application of a 'job ready', 'employment ready', job coaching and matching approach could be trialed with graduates of the Women with Disabilities Leadership Program in a variety of formal and informal employment settings, sectors and geographical locations.

## **2. Employers need to be ‘employment ready’**

### **Build employment readiness with targeted support to businesses**

To date, employment programs in Cambodia have given little, if any, attention to understanding employer needs and concerns. Consequently, employer needs have gone largely unaddressed, and workplaces have been poorly prepared and equipped to welcome, accommodate and retain employees with disabilities. Moreover, little, if any, support and attention has been given to building the skills and knowledge of workplace colleagues without disabilities. International evidence suggests that the likelihood of employment depends upon this preparatory work as it ensures employers and workplaces are welcoming, confident and accessible (Murfitt et al, 2017).

Employers need support targeted to their level of disability confidence, that is their knowledge of how to make workplace adjustments, to ensure recruitment is inclusive and to provide accessible customer service (Murfitt et al, 2016, 2017). Three broad employer typologies were identified in relation to their exposure to disability, knowledge, attitudes, confidence and willingness to engage employees with disabilities. This typology is a useful way to develop support strategies targeted to employer exposure, confidence and experience in inclusive employment (Bartolotto et al, 2014).<sup>14</sup>

#### **Group 1. The Ambassadors**

**Employers who look for the ability and skills of a potential employee**

For this group, the most important consideration is whether a job seeker is able to competently perform the work task required, contribute to the business and its profitability. They see ability before disability. Employers consider soft skills to be equally important as vocational or technical skills, and look for employees with the right attitude and behaviour suitable to the work setting – such as punctuality, professionalism and good communication. Employers see ability when potential employees with disability have the requisite skills and aptitude. For example:

*“We do not see disability in her...only her movement is affected but this does not affect her [work].”*  
(private sector employer)

*“I do not think about disability but whether she can do the job and if she has the skills or not...because they [people with disabilities] have the same rights.”*  
(business owner)

*“At first when I [woman with a mobility impairment] was interviewed by HR....I thought why do they need a person with disability... they need a person who can do the job....disability is not important.”*  
(woman with a mobility impairment working as an accountant in the private sector)

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<sup>14</sup> Bartolotto et al (2014) refer to these three groups as The Choir, The Inclusives and The Uninitiated.



These employers recognise the commitment and focus that people with disabilities bring to their workforce and the value they add to their business.

*"People with disabilities are more committed to work because they want to improve their skills and ability... it is hard for them to find a job..."*

*(private sector employer)*

*"[They] like to employ deaf students, they work hard and are focused."*

*(LNGO representative)*

This group of employers experienced no challenges or real differences when employing people with mobility impairments in office-based workplaces. These employers required no additional assistance to employ people with disabilities and stated that they would willingly give opportunities to others even if they required assistance.

*"We did not notice any real difference with employing people with disabilities."*

*(private sector employer)*

*"I would not say no to [employing] anyone...whatever support they needed, I will help them. If an opportunity arises to employ (persons with disabilities), we give it."*

*(private sector employer)*

These employers engage people with disabilities because of their ability rather than being driven by the legal requirements of the Quota system which they may or may not be aware of. For example:

*"Employers know well about disability and do not employ because of pity or the quota system but because of ability."*

*(private sector employer)*

These employers recognise that disability does not necessarily affect mental capacity:

*"Disability is in the body, not the brain."*

*(private sector employer)*

*"If part of the body has a disability, then need to develop the brain."*

*(private sector employer)*

To meet employer needs and be job ready, people with disabilities need hard, and most importantly soft, skills. As an employer noted:

*"What is important is people with disabilities themselves...before an employer can accept them, they must have knowledge, skills and confidence...not to see themselves as people with disabilities but as equal...they need to teach others that 'even if I get employed, I am confident enough to be treated equally and not to get special treatment.'"*

*(private sector employer)*

*"People with disabilities need knowledge of job expectations...workplace culture, rules, responsibility and appropriate behaviour."*

*(private sector employer)*

*"Attitude and commitment must be shown...a willingness to learn - we focus on these sets of skills."*

*(private sector employer)*

Business owners noted that they require employees who have a basic level of education and the capacity to learn new skills quickly. For example:

*“Employees who are fast learners and adaptive...able to learn new skills...the [people with disabilities] we employed had low level skills because they had a low level of education generally and were not quick learners.”*

*(private sector employer)*

People with disabilities thus need better access to, and greater retention in, school and higher education to ensure that over time they will be adequately equipped to gain a range of employment opportunities from unskilled to skilled, professional level positions. Moreover, periodic on the job training may be required as a short-term strategy to promote learning and the development of hard and soft skills.

#### **Box 4: Employers look for employees with hard and soft skills**

*“The private sector will employ anyone so long as they make a profit...the skills and capacity of employees are most important.”*

*(IO representative)*

*“They have the skills and know-how and are able to do office work so there is no problem.”*

*(private sector employer)*

*“They are increasingly employing people with hearing and visual impairments because they have seen their capacity and know that they are a ‘good product’...good employees.”*

*(LNGO representative)*

*“We look for enthusiasm and keenness to work.”*

*(LNGO representative)*

*“They are responsible and know enough about what they need to do.”*

*(private sector employer)*

*“Communication is most important because if we do not understand, it leads to problems and if we can communicate, we can solve the problems.”*

*(private sector employer)*

*“We want to hire people who are able to work...we look at job fit.”*

*(private sector employer)*

## **Group 2. The Inclusives**

### **Employers who are motivated by a sense of social responsibility**

The second group of employers want to help people with disabilities by giving employment opportunities, supporting their skill development and by doing so, building their capacity to live independently. These employers are motivated to help people with disabilities and those who currently employ people with disabilities had a strong sense of social responsibility. They wanted to provide support to people with disabilities, and women in particular. They expressed a strong motivation to give opportunities. These employers were described as *“having a heart”* (LNGO representative). For example:

*“The Director likes to help women with less privileges and to give them opportunities.”*  
(private sector employer)

*“I teach them how to live.”*  
(private sector employer)

*“I wanted to help women with disability....I am a woman with disability...I tell them (women with disability) to be stronger and more skilled every day... help yourself so that if you are not working with me you are able to do everything yourself...”*  
(private sector employer)

For these employers their businesses were about making a social contribution as well as profitability. Helping others is a key motivation and driver of these social enterprises. For example:

*“If we think only about money, people with disabilities might not be as fast as others...if we only think about money it is not perfect...we just think about helping and about being stronger.”*  
(private sector employer)

*“I feel better if people with visual impairments have a place to stay and food to eat...I have to sell. I have a commitment...it is my goal...if I am not selling how many people have no income and no food.”*  
(private sector employer)

*“You try to work hard, I will look after you. I like to help and improve their lives.”*  
(private sector employer)

The women with disabilities working in these social enterprises interviewed in this study, lived on-site with accommodation and meals provided in a family-like context as a part of their salaries. On their day off they visited their families and/or return to their villages. These informal work arrangements in small to medium sized enterprises are likely to be very common. Women with mobility impairments living and working in these enterprises who were visited, lived upstairs and rarely came down due to poor accessibility. Greater examination of women’s experiences within these work contexts is warranted as they could be at risk of social isolation, mistreatment and exploitation. For example:

*“I have not had much experience working with people with disabilities...this is the first person...getting up and down the stairs was difficult...we do not need support from EPC because this woman is good enough.”*  
(private sector employer)

There is a further risk that employers motivated by the desire to help people with disabilities perpetuate charity models of assistance and social perceptions of disability as inability. For example, one informant shared the story of large company wanting to ‘help’ by employing large numbers of people with disabilities in poor status work with a low base salary supplemented by sales commissions. In instances such as these, salaries are insufficient to cover daily food, transport and housing costs and thus keep people with disabilities living in poverty. When, and if, people with disabilities accept such work arrangements it is unlikely that they will be sustained when salary levels are so low. These jobs are referred to as “*low status pity jobs*” for people considered to be “*one of a kind...not normal*” (key informant, July 2018). For example, “*employers provide jobs through pity and not their skills and capacity*” (key informant).

While some employees in this group see ability first, for others feelings of pity and charity may motivate them and/or they may only engage people with disabilities in a narrow range of positions that reinforce low social status.

### Group 3. The Uninitiated

#### **Employers who are not yet employing people with disability**

This group of employers have poor understanding of disability and are concerned that people with disabilities will not be able to perform the required tasks to the same quality and quantity as others. They are ultimately concerned that business profitability and that the social perception of the business will be negatively affected, and are reluctant to employ people with disabilities.

Employers who equate disability with inability do not think employment is viable or indeed possible for people with disability. There continues to be poor understanding of disability, the actions and behaviours that constitute discrimination and the types of discrimination experienced by people with disabilities. Greater exposure to people with disability is required. There are three key issues for these employers and the following quotes provide examples of their concerns and attitudes. First, employers lack understanding of disability, for example:

*“There are many jobs in factories but they do not understand and do not know that people who are blind can work...some have work in the factories – it depends on the factory owner...employers still discriminate.”*  
(LNGO representative)

*“Employers do not understand...it is difficult...general staff do not have much understanding of disability.”*  
(private sector employer)

*“If people have difficulties to move with the body and if staff have a problem with their arm or something, my boss might say no.”*  
(private sector employer)

Second, employers are concerned with the quality and quantity of work performed by people with disabilities:

*“They think that the people with disabilities will not do a proper job like people without disabilities...the quantity of the work will not be the same amount because of their disability.”*  
(private sector employer)

*“They would see the productivity of people with disabilities as less than others but this is not really the case...everything is money minded and everyone wants to get the best.”*  
(private sector employer)

*“They [people with disabilities] will not do good quality work...they are too slow...cannot move well... they do not look good....so this is not a good look for the company.”*  
(private sector employer)

Third, employers are concerned about negative social perceptions of businesses that employ people with disabilities and about negative repercussions:

*“Clients and customers will think that if they employ a person with disability, it is negative and stigmatised and that there is bullying at work.” (private sector employer)*

*“Employers are skeptical to hire people with disability in Cambodia because of education and training and because people are not friendly toward those with disability because of social attitudes...we want to hire people who are able to work...we look at job fit.” (private sector employer)*

*“Business will not accept people with disability because they will lose.” (private sector employer)*

*“There is an attitude of not putting a person with disability at the front desk in an organisation because it is a bad look...” (private sector employer)*

There are also social expectations about employees in different industries, particularly in banking, tourism or in any front office function. Staff in these roles are expected to be beautiful. For example:

*“If you want to work in a bank, you have to be very beautiful...[I] hesitate to put people with disabilities at the front of the house.” (private sector employer)*

*“[I] have to see how disabled they are...if they are in a wheelchair, they cannot move fast...if banking industry, logistics...people with disabilities cannot work here...adds say able-bodied<sup>15</sup> this criteria is still very important for banks.” (private sector employer)*

*“Back office, HR and finance are all ok for people with disabilities and NGOs too because they do not think about profit.” (private sector employer)*

Together, these reasons mean that if businesses employ people with disabilities they will be negatively impacted, which explains why when people with disabilities submit applications for available positions they do not hear back from employers or “employers always say ‘we are full’” (woman with mobility impairment).

In addition, some employers would like the Government to role model inclusive employment. The experiences of young men and women with disabilities who are employed with the government demonstrates continuing opportunities for improvements to increase physical accessibility, access to equipment and access to meaning skilled work. Some employers felt that the responsibility for inclusive employment is being put onto employers. For example:

*“Employers felt paying the fine [for not employing people with disabilities as stated in the Quota system of employment] would be easier then employing a person with disability...they felt the burden had been given to employers and employers can’t be forced to employ someone because they are person with disability or because of the quota but because of skills and capacity and rights...some employers said they would prefer to pay the fine [for the quota] and that this would be cheaper.” (IO representative)*

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<sup>15</sup> The Khmer expression used is ‘guy sompatier loor’ which means to be able-bodied.

Despite the Cambodian Constitution and legal framework advocating a rights-based approach to disability and employment, there are persistent discriminatory barriers. The requirement to be able bodied<sup>16</sup> continues to be used on job announcements despite its use being legislated against. For example:

*“Some employers still advertise with ‘guy sompatier loor’ – able-bodied as a requirement...the Law has not been properly enforced in the private sector and in the government...government implementation of the quota system is weak.”*  
(IO representative)

The continued use of ‘able-bodied’ is evidence of the need for greater understanding of what constitutes discrimination, how discrimination occurs and what non-discriminatory action and behaviour looks like. For example:

*“They do not realise they are discriminating...it is a blind spot...”*  
(private sector employer)

The requirement to be ‘full bodied’ discriminates against people with disabilities by discouraging them to apply for employment positions, and is evidence of the need to change socio-cultural attitudes and institutionalised barriers to inclusive employment. Whilst some employers had heard about the Law and Quota system, overall employer awareness of their legal obligations and responsibilities needs to be strengthened. Ongoing monitoring of the implementation of anti-discriminatory policy is required.

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<sup>16</sup> The Khmer expression used is ‘guy sompatier loor’ which means to be able-bodied.



### **3. Job coaches match ‘job ready’ with ‘employment ready’**

Employers who want to employ people with disabilities need to know where to go to find employees with disabilities, to get practical support and guidance if, and when, they need it. The employers interviewed in this study had recruited people with disabilities through their own social connections with people working in the disability sector or they had previously worked in the disability sector themselves. A more formalised systems level approach is required.

Employers, young people with disabilities and service providers are supportive of a one-stop-shop that delivers an inclusive employment outreach model. Such a service could be delivered through a real and a virtual job centre where job seekers of all abilities can access information in accessible formats, computers, advice on writing CV's and cover letters, as well as connect with training and leadership programs, other job seekers and job coaches. Job coaches can also invite people with disabilities who have successfully attained jobs to talk with and act as role models by sharing what they have learnt with other job seekers with disabilities.

All three employer groups would benefit from an inclusive employment service based on a 'help desk' where a job coach supports them to be employment ready and to prepare workplaces. Job coaches can provide employers with a road map so that businesses have a clear path or plan which they can follow to improve their inclusiveness over time. An employer road map could indicate best practice and progress measures to be monitored over time.

Job coaching is a relatively new approach to employer and job seeker support that leads to job placement in Cambodia. One international NGO has been matching job seekers with employers for a number of years and have found a job coaching model is effective as it provides job seekers with disabilities access to information and teaches them job searching skills. Furthermore, job coaches advocate with employers on behalf of people with disabilities and are a source of reliable employees that employers trust (see also Gartrell et al, 2016). Experience to date demonstrates that advocacy with employers on behalf of people with disabilities is critical to opening employment opportunities to people with disabilities.

Although the National Employment Agency (NEA) provides job coaching and links job seekers to employers, a very small proportion of their job seekers are people with disabilities. Findings also suggest that whilst the NEA accepts the CV's of people with disabilities and may forward them to employers, they do not advocate with employers on behalf of job seekers with disabilities. The NEA model is not an effective approach to transitioning into employment for job seekers with disabilities. As one informant described:

*“The so called NEA...they just take your CV and do nothing...the box for our CVs is the rubbish bin...when we apply through the NEA we submit our CV and hear nothing.”*

*(young man with a mobility impairment)*

Matching job seekers with disabilities with employers using a job coach who actively advocates on their behalf is critical. Investment in building a pool of skilled job coaches is needed as presently NGO disability employment programs struggle to find appropriately skilled staff.

Job coaches and other staff currently working to promote disability inclusion with employers find that engaging employers within a service model is a good approach. For example:

*“We [LNGO] sell a service, and when the product is limited [people with disabilities who are job ready], employers need to choose...we can be less pushy now [because] employers are seeing that [people with disabilities] are capable enough to do the job for you.”*  
(LNGO representative)

From this perspective ensuring that the product – that is employees with disability – are good quality and competitively priced is key. When this is the case employers will want to purchase the product. As the number of lasting job placements increase, job coaches can use employer testimonies to educate employers and to show them that the successful employment of people with disabilities is possible. For example:

*“When employers see an example of employing a person with disability that works, the attitudes of the Human Resource Manager changes.”*  
(LNGO representative)

*“If employers get orientation on disability, they understand and will employ people with disabilities...they do not know about the Law and the rights of people with disabilities and discrimination...they do not expect that a person with disability can work with them...they need to learn about inclusive development, laws and rights.”*  
(LNGO representative)

*“It is not such a big job to recruit employers...we teach them about the project and about disability and employment and so they are keen.”*  
(LNGO representative)

Learning how to maintain good relationships with employers and retaining jobs is a key challenge and different approaches need to be explored. On this point, findings in this study were mixed with some job coaches stating that they found it easy to maintain relationships with employers. Others described it as a challenge initially and becoming easier as more employers see successful cases. Job coaches and service providers need to adopt an adaptive learning-based approach to ensure that the most effective approaches to employer engagement, coaching job seekers and matching can be identified and routinely practiced. Ongoing monitoring and documentation of processes and outcomes using a learning-based action research approach is needed. Learning from unsuccessful matches can be a source of insight into employer needs, the most important soft skills needed by job seekers with disabilities as well as any support they may need to ensure they understand workplace culture and expectations. As the case study in the Box 5 below illustrates, communication skills, cultural factors and little understanding of work environments can undermine the longevity of work placements and job coaches can play a key role in addressing these issues.

Job coaches can also promote good relationships between employers and the RGC, an important consideration for businesses operating in Cambodia. One way companies can strengthen their connections with the government is by “*doing something that the government wants by employing people with disabilities...so there is a bigger market demand for employees with disabilities now...*” (LNGO representative). The example of Chip Mong Group<sup>17</sup> – a Khmer beverages house demonstrate this point:

*“The owner has a close relationship with the government so they are increasingly employing people with visual and hearing impairments because they have seen their capacity and know that they are a good product... good employees.”*

*(LNGO representative)*

#### Box 5: Learning from unsuccessful job placements

*“We hired people with disabilities because we wanted to give them a job but they were not necessarily the right fit for the job. In a business environment they got stuck. They couldn’t go back to school because they were older and had children and low level skills because they had a low level of education generally...they were not quick learners.*

*To be honest, it was not a positive experience...we lacked experience and we wanted to give people with disability a job...this was our priority and it was not a good job fit...they did protective behaviour...there were performance and attitude issues...everyone [should] be treated equally but they [people with disabilities] would say they wanted lower targets, so it was difficult to deal with emotionally...everything you said had to be said sensitively...*

*Every business has rules and regulations but when staff have a disability, we could not enforce strict rules...so performance management was difficult because the staff with disabilities expect special treatment...as do those around them and others look at supervisors badly....excuses and not showing up at work...lots of requests for another chance and another chance...and staff members with disability talk about their problems in the workplace...sometimes it is too much to handle all the problems...we do not want to be involved in all the problems...”*

*(private sector employer)*

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.chipmong.com/>

## **CONCLUSION**

Although NGOs have been providing skills and vocational training to people with disabilities in Cambodia for over two decades, transitions into employment have been poorly documented and anecdotal evidence suggests that outcomes have been mixed. Part of the problem has been the sole focus on people with disabilities themselves, the neglect of employer needs, the preparation of workplaces and matching job seekers to employers.

This study has identified that a model is needed where job seekers with disabilities are supported to get job ready *and* employers to get employment ready. People with disabilities and employers support the establishment an inclusive employment centre. In the short term, it is recommended that the job coach inclusive employment model is further trialled through the development of an employer tool box that contains a variety of supports that job coaches can select to provide customised employer support. Employer supports need to be specifically targeted to the business context and to employer levels of disability confidence and tracked over time using an applied learning and action research approach.

For job seekers, greater access to leadership programs is the first step to build their soft skills, confidence, communication, advocacy and to set employment and livelihood goals around which supports can be tailored. People with disabilities then need to be supported as they transition from the leadership program into employment supports that might include real work experience such as job trials, mentoring programs with employers, internships, apprenticeships and job shadow days.

People with disabilities are likely to continue to experience significant challenges in accessing education, TVET and other training and higher education opportunities for some time yet. A model which works on job readiness, employer readiness, and the link between the two is thus recommended as the strategy most likely to increase access to employment and livelihood opportunities for people with disabilities in the short to medium term whilst these institutional issues are addressed.

Figure 1: An inclusive employment model in Cambodia

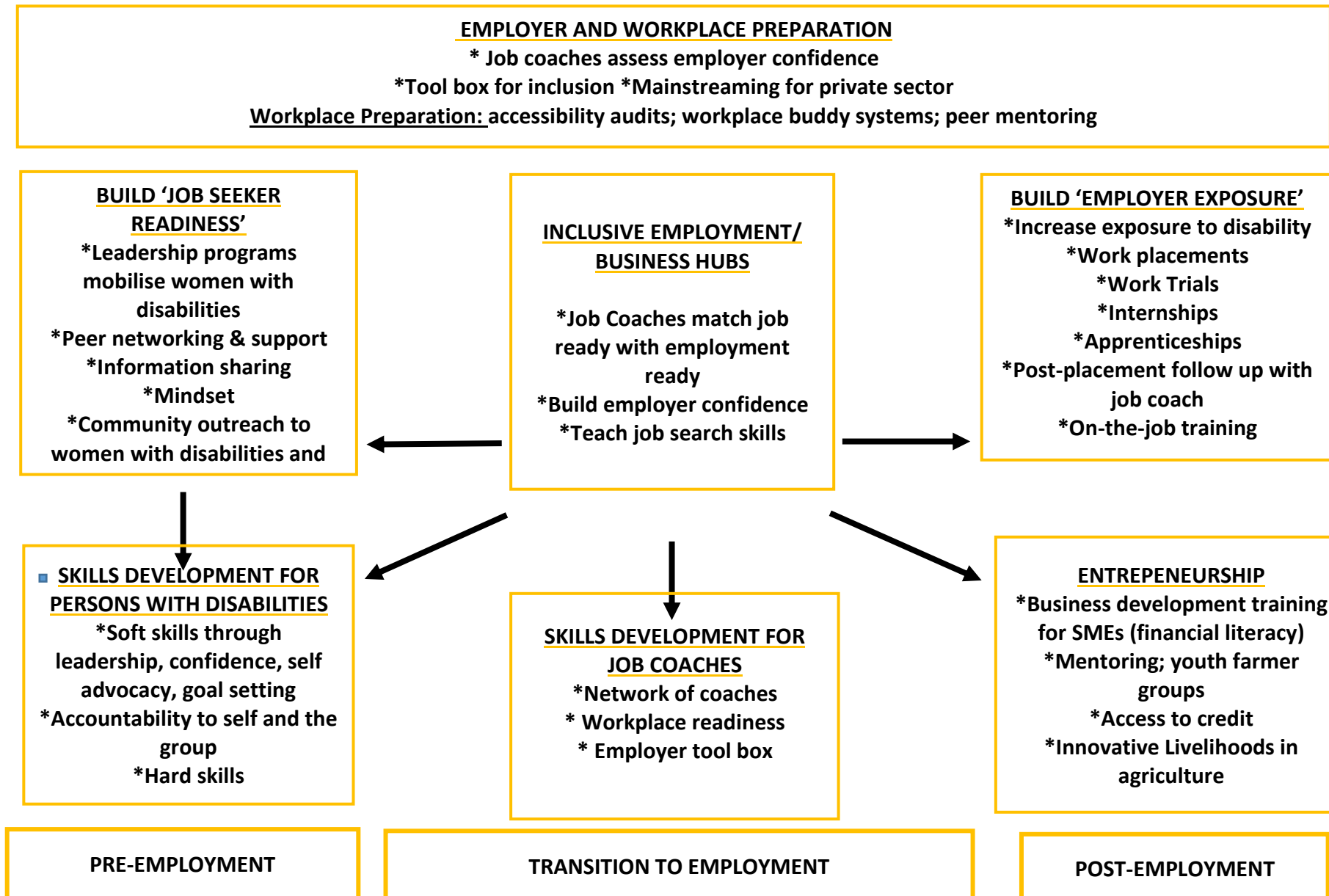
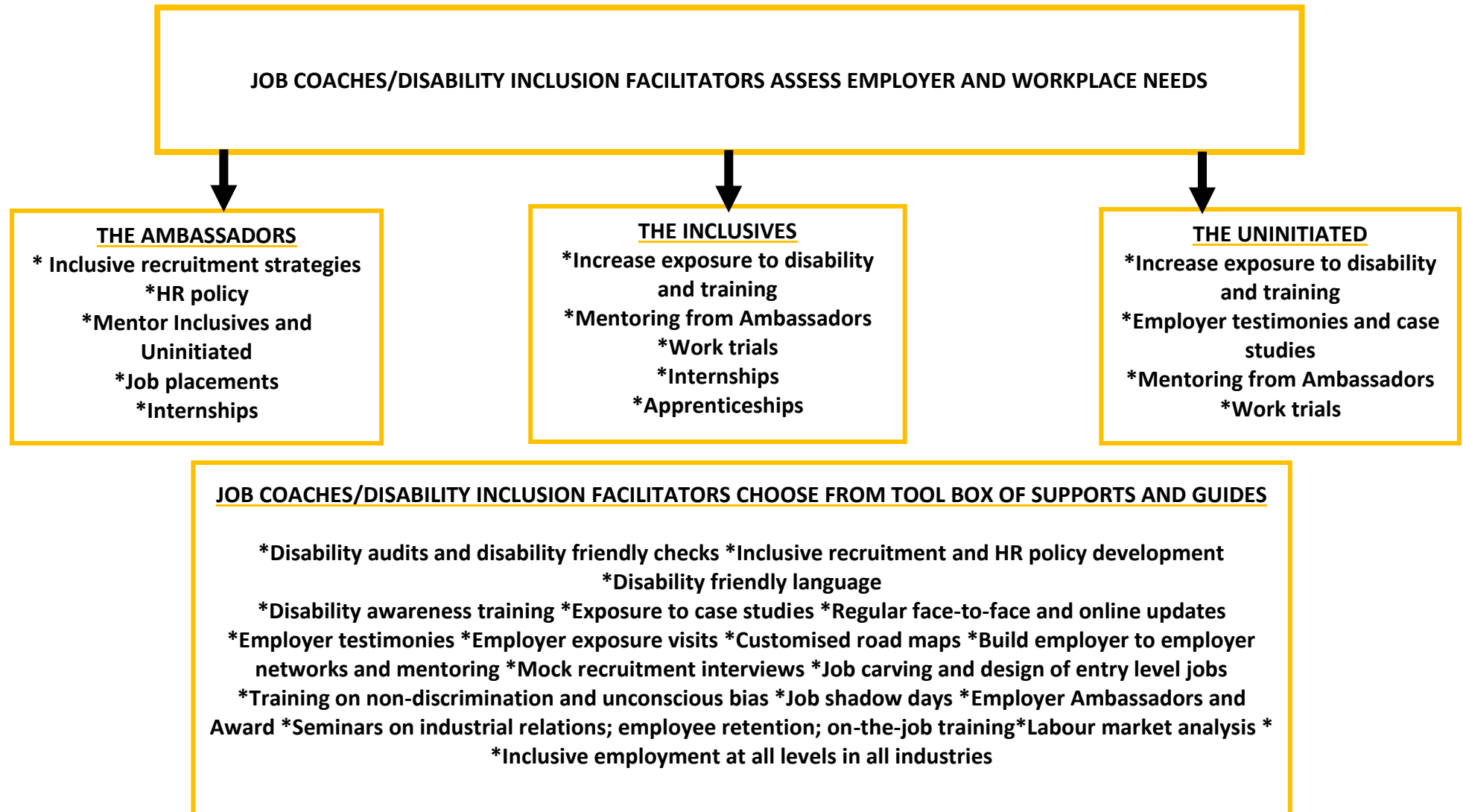


Figure 2: Customised support to build employer readiness: A toolbox approach



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