

**Union of Myanmar**

**Country Report**

**presented to**

**High-level Intergovernmental Meeting  
to conclude the Asian and Pacific  
Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002  
(25-28 October 2002)**

**By**

**U Maung Myint  
Deputy Director  
Department of Social Welfare**

## Country Report on Welfare for People with Disabilities in Myanmar

### INTRODUCTION

1. Myanmar, located in South-East Asia is bounded by Thailand and Lao in the east, China in the north and north east, India in the north west and Bangladesh in the west. Myanmar covers an area of 677,000 square kilometers of the Indo-China peninsula. The population in 2001 was estimated at 50.12 million with the annual growth rate of 2.02. More than 72 percent of the population (i.e. 35.08 million) reside in the rural areas and the remaining (i.e. 14.04 million) are urban dwellers.

2. According to the report by the ministry of Health, (2001) average life expectancy for male is 60.4 and for female 62.8. Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births) is 48.5 and Maternal mortality rate is 1.0 for urban and 1.7 for rural area. ( National Report on Follow up to the world Summit for Children). Education in Myanmar is not as yet compulsory but the authorities concerned are striving towards it. Educationalists being carried out for out of school youths to provide them with the opportunity for education. The adult literacy rate is 83% (1996).

### Situation of People with Disabilities.

3. Since Myanmar has not yet been able to develop a database for the disability situation at the National level, the extent, nature of disability cannot accurately be presented in this report. The two stage sample survey conducted by the Health Information Service of the Department of Health in 1985 estimated that about 2% of the Population at that time has had physically disabilities. This figure does not include other disabilities. If other disabilities were included this figure would be considerably much higher.

4. The status of a person with disability in Myanmar society is that no matter what the cause or condition of the disability, he or she can fully enjoy fundamental, as well as civil rights within the legal frame work. However in reality violation of some of the civil right of people with disabilities still occurs. Policy declaration concerning people with disabilities made by the government of the Union of Myanmar stated that every possible ways and means must be taken to enable people with disabilities to take full advantage of rehabilitation services. Rehabilitated people should be given every opportunity to participate in productive work and rehabilitation of people with disabilities should lead to self reliance and decrease dependence on others.

5. Services for PWDs are undertaken by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement. For prevention, early detection & intervention, the Department of the Health as well as the Association for Maternal and Child Welfare take care of pre natal and natal care of mother and child. Polio eradication campaign is also being carried out throughout the country. For medical rehabilitation, there are two main hospitals, One in Yangon, the Capital and one in Mandalay the second largest city in the country. Township hospitals also have departments where rehabilitation services are provided.

6. The Social Welfare established special schools and vocational training schools for PWDs. There are special schools for each different types of PWDs, the hearing impaired, the visually handicapped, the physically disabled and the mentally retarded. Vocational training schools are established for the physically handicapped to prepare them for independent living.

7. There have been scattered efforts over the past thirty years to increase opportunities and services for disabled persons, and initial steps have been taken towards improving the quality of life of Myanmar's disabled population. Under Myanmar's recent national plans, UN encouragement and NGO involvement, efforts to aid disabled persons will gain greater attention in the coming years. As these efforts are made, they must be built upon an understanding of the present needs that make up the situation of disabled persons in Myanmar. Such understanding involves not only consideration of existing activities and services, but also the strengths that are developing in these services and the particular needs of Myanmar's disabled population.

#### **Highlights of the implementation of the Agenda for Action for the Asian & Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 1993-2002.**

##### **A Legislation & Co-ordinating mechanism on disability matters**

8. Although the disabled persons law is not yet enacted, preparations are being made to renew the drafted law. During the decade a workshop has been held which comprises of people who are working with and for PWDs, both from GO and NGO sectors. It is the first of its kind where people who have the best interest of PWDs put their resources together to formulate a law which will ensure that the PWDs have equality and full participation in the society.

9. Meanwhile, the 1954 Security Act ensure the provision of orthotic and prosthetic devices (repair, renew) and rehabilitation rights to PWDs who are insured. Permanent disability pension and medical care are also provided.

#### B. Education for Children and Youth with disabilities

10. The new child law enacted in 1993, ensures education and protection for all children with disabilities. Realizing the need for a combine effort by the Government as well as private sectors to promote equal rights and full participation of PWDs, the Government encourages and net work with NGOs in the implementation of the Agenda for Action. During the decade, emergences of NGOs working for the education and vocational training of PWDs are seen. Religious Associations and Individuals who have the expertise and PWDs interest at heart and NGOs started education, vocational and social services programmes for PWDs.

11. During the decade inclusive education for PWDs staying in institutions are introduced in mainstream schools. It is found that the programme is quite successful. This initial programme is envisaged to pave the way to inclusive education for all PWDs in the country.

#### C. Freedom of movement and independent living

12. Recognizing the need for smooth transportation and communication for the public, the Government of the Union of Myanmar has been building roads and bridges through out the country. Facilities for barrier free environment for PWDs is still an area that has to be planned and implemented. With the development of the country's economic programmes barrier free environment is a possibility which would lead to freedom of movement for PWDs.

#### D. Training and Employment

13. With the encouragement from the Government, efforts have been made by NGOs to find ways and means to conduct vocational training which would lead to more job opportunities. Apart from governmental arrangements for job placements at different Government Departments, to get encouragement and support for self-employment, NGOs also initiate their own training and placement programmes.

14. Business courses for the Blind, A Community Resettlement Programme for the Blind (CRP) provided the visually handicapped with means for animal breeding and cultivation. Likewise, other provisions for vocational trainings, support, and follow-up job placement for different kinds of disabilities (women's included) have emerged during the decade.

### **E. Access to information and communication**

15. This decade have seen the improvement of the means of information and communication organisations working for or with PWDs have tried to make the public as well as PWDs, their family aware of services available in the country through journals, press media etc. They published news letters, journals and distributed pamphlets to give the information of PWDs. There is also an improvement in communication for the hearing impaired.

16. The result of a training course for the standardization of sign-language conducted during the decade was that sign-language interpretation was used at the 1<sup>st</sup> National Leadership Seminar for PWDs. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> time that sign-language interpretation was available to the deaf.

### **F. Poverty alleviation and community participation of rural persons with disabilities**

17. To meet the need of PWDs in Semi Urban and rural areas some organizations either join hands with the Government or independently initial CBR programme for PWDs. The focus is not only on disabilities issue but also on the economic and social situation of the families concerned. Due to these activities the community is becoming aware of the disabilities issues and active participation of the community is found in some areas especially where PWDs themselves are involved.

### **G. Self-help organisations of persons with disabilities and issues concerning women with disabilities**

18. After the holding of the 1<sup>st</sup> National Leadership Seminar for PWDs, People with disabilities are starting to be aware of the fact that they should themselves organise and participate to promote their own welfare. The result was that there has been scattered efforts from PWDs during the decade to form themselves into groups and look into the psychological, social and economic issues facing the PWDs.

### **Conclusion**

19. Although the Government of the Union of Myanmar has made policy declaration and established policy objectives regarding people with disabilities, the implementation to effectively fulfill these objectives is hindered by financial constraints and lack of trained personnel.

20. The linkage between Government and NGOs activities still need to be further strengthened to make the services more effective.