

PROMOTING THE SELF-DEVELOPMENT, ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF PWDs

SUMMARY

The Philippines has enacted a number of laws to ensure the self-development, self-reliance and integration of persons-with-disability (PWDs) into the mainstream society. While these policies are already in place, several gaps have been observed in relation to their implementation. PWDs from the provinces of Northern Samar, Eastern Samar, Samar and Masbate identified five main issues concerning the sector during the monitoring activity: the unavailability of discount privileges, insufficient livelihood support, weak implementation of the Accessibility Law, inadequate health support and services, and the inability of the sector to organize and form groups. Particular attention should be given to the last one because it opens the floodgates for other issues to arise, including the lack of representation and participation in the governance process and in the creation of policies concerning the sector.

This Policy Brief looks into these issues and echoes the recommendations from the grassroots to improve existing policies and their implementation.

DISCOUNT PRIVILEGES

Republic Act 7277 (Magna Carta for Persons with Disability), as amended by Republic Act 9442 and Republic Act 10754 (An Act Expanding the Benefits and Privileges of PWDs) entitles PWDs to a 20% discount and exemption from the value-added tax (VAT), if applicable, when availing several goods and services. This covers the purchase of medicines and basic commodities, and commute using public transportation.

19 of 20 municipalities/cities reported instances when PWDs were unable to avail of their discounts

Store owners asserted that only the more affluent LGUs implement the 20% discount on goods and services. This was supported by statements of LGU officials who said only the big establishments and pharmacies can afford to give the discount. Others provide discount but only 10%. On the other hand, there were also cases of transportation companies requiring PWDs to submit a photocopy of their IDs before getting the discount.

Then there were also those who are not aware that the privilege also covers PWDs and not just the senior citizens. They argued that the LGU did not conduct orientations so they do not know which items will be discounted, especially when it comes to basic commodities/groceries.

Meanwhile, some PWDs cannot avail because they don't have IDs and purchase booklets and/or are entirely unaware of the program.

It is recommended for the LGU to conduct an information dissemination campaign to inform PWDs of their rights and benefits and to orient the sector of the process and requirements when applying for the discount cards.

Simultaneously, the LGU should also conduct an orientation and consultation with all establishment owners about the provision before renewing their business permits. There should be a common understanding between the LGU and the establishments on how to properly implement the law without aggravating the PWDs nor the establishments. The LGU should also pass a local ordinance to ensure strict compliance with the law. Violators should be penalized.

ORGANIZING AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

9 municipalities said the PWD associations are not organized and registered at the barangay level

Because they are not organized, the voice of the PWDs are not amplified enough to tell their issues and needs, particularly those that concern health and livelihood. Two factors were identified as reasons for this gap: 1) PWDs themselves are not registered and neither the BLGU nor the LGU has a masterlist of all registered PWDs; and 2) PWDs do not receive adequate assistance from the LGU to allow them to form groups. Members of the sector do not know who among the local officials should they approach and seek help from so that they can organize themselves and register their group.

The lack of organization among the members of the sectors has led to several gaps that affected their participation:

- **Absence of a PDAO desk and focal person** (8 municipalities): Republic Act 10070 mandates the creation of a Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO) in every province, city and municipality in the country to represent the sector in meetings of local development councils and other special bodies, ensure proper implementation of the laws, and disseminate information about the sector, among others. However, a PWD organization in Lope De Vega and Balud pointed out that the PWDs in every barangay should be organized first in order to come up with a masterlist and concrete dataset before the creation of the office;

- **Inability to access the sector's share of the LGU's IRA** (5 municipalities): Monitoring results showed PWDs cannot access their share of the LGU's IRA because 1) PWD groups remain unorganized; 2) PWDs lack adequate knowledge on the crafting of the Annual Investment Plan; and 3) the sector is not involved in the barangay planning and budgeting. Some PWDs aren't even aware that they have a share on the municipality's IRA; and
- **Absence of livelihood programs and other services for PWDs** (4 municipalities): Local officials connect this problem to the absence of PWD groups in the municipality that will help them identify the appropriate programs for the sector.

Many PWDs remain unregistered due to the following reasons: 1) they are not aware of the benefits and privileges once they get registered; 2) they do not know the registration process; 3) some PWDs cannot go to the LGU and register due to their disability; and 4) there is no focal person to facilitate the application and registration of PWDs.

To address this, the MSWDO should hold a mobile registration in all barangays for PWDs and conduct yearly orientations about the process of applying for a PWD ID. Based on the data gathered, each barangay should have a masterlist of all PWDs.

Afterwards, the MSWDO and BLGU should work together and organize the PWDs. These organizations should be registered, accredited and included in Local Special Bodies in the barangay and municipality. Trainings should also be conducted to ensure the sustainability of these organizations in the long run. Orientations and adequate trainings on the crafting of project proposals as well as the Annual Investment Plan should be conducted. They should also be informed and provided with technical assistance on how they can access their share in the IRA.

Moreover, the LGU should establish a PDAO desk and/or appoint a PWD focal person to help address the issues and concerns of the sector, and provide representation. Plans and programs for PWDs should be included in the Municipal Development Plan and should have adequate budget.

LIVELIHOOD PROVISIONS

16 of the 20 municipalities said livelihood support/ programs for PWDs are lacking or insufficient

The absence of PWD organizations also made the provision and access to livelihood support more difficult. Members of the sector have pointed out that some of the livelihood programs offered to them do not match their skills and interests. The location of training centers also posed a barrier since these were far from their home. Eventually, the livelihood programs have not been sustained in the long run because the PWDs were not provided with adequate training.

The LGU, MSWDO and DTI should conduct an assessment and consultation within the sector in order to come up with appropriate livelihood programs that will match their capacities and skills. These programs should be included later on in the municipality's Annual Investment Plan (AIP). The LGU should also conduct trainings on how to effectively craft project proposals that the sector can submit to government offices or to private companies for

funding, as well as financial literacy trainings to teach the members how to raise and sustain their income. All of these should be done in the barangays so that it will be accessible for all PWDs.

In terms of national policies, the following measures are proposed:

- Review, monitor and reinforce the provisions under RA 7277 on the qualifications of PWDs for educational assistance. Local Government Units should strictly follow the provision on educational assistance by having Special Education Centers for PWDs;
- The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) National Council on Disability Affairs, and Department of Labor and Employment should be working together in identifying possible expansion of livelihood and employment programs in the provinces;
- PWDs (and/or their families) under the Conditional Cash Transfer Program should be automatically given livelihood trainings to start up their respective livelihood; and
- Automatic basic income for working PWDs in the formal labor sector.

ACCESSIBILITY LAW

Batas Pambansa 344 or the Accessibility Law was enacted to enhance the mobility of PWDs. It requires certain buildings, institutions, establishments and public utilities to install facilities and other devices that will allow universal access and inclusion.

10 municipalities pointed out the weak implementation of the Accessibility Law

According to the participants of the monitoring activity, government and private buildings are not inclusive and PWD-friendly. Only a few of them are built with features such as ramps, handrails and PWD-friendly toilets, and provide assistive devices.

They recommend that the law on universal access be included in the Municipal Engineering Standards. The LGU should also call for meetings and orientations with government officials and building owners to inform them about the policy and standards.

HEALTH SUPPORT AND SERVICES

Members of the sector also highlighted several gaps in relation to the health and medical support/services being provided by the LGU. These include the inadequate supply of medicine for PWDs in local hospitals and that many PWDs are not yet enrolled with PhilHealth.

Information dissemination activities should be broadened to inform PWDs of the health programs that they can avail from the municipality, barangay and health centers. The LGU should also design a health program that will specifically cater to the needs of PWDs. LGUs should allocate funds to provide sufficient supply of medicines to PWDs. It should also conduct regular medical missions and raise awareness.

At the national level, the DSWD and DILG should work together in providing appropriate assistive devices for PWDs and ensure that the members of the sector can access them. Moreover, a financial support scheme should also be provided by setting a standard model of the application on health insurances.



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