

Chapter 3

A Framework for Action: Findings for Policymakers and Other Key Stakeholders

September 2021

This chapter should be cited as

Crosta, N. and A. Sanders (2021), 'A Framework for Action: Findings for Policymakers and Other Key Stakeholders', in Crost, N. and A. Sanders (eds.), *Social Enterprises and Disability: Fostering Innovation, Awareness and Social Impact in the ASEAN Region*. ERIA Research Project Report FY2021 No. 12, Jakarta: ERIA, pp.15-21.

Chapter 3

A Framework for Action: Findings for Policymakers and other Key Stakeholders

3.1 The untapped potential of SEs addressing disability in the ASEAN region

Research reveals that SEs carry tremendous potential for achieving inclusion of persons with disabilities in their respective markets and communities, but this potential remains to be fully realised. Confirmed by the mapping exercise and case studies conducted for this study, it is evident that SEs offer solutions that can make a significant difference and help tackle disability issues in the ASEAN region. SEs are uniquely able to offer:

- **Innovation:** SEs bring about new solutions for inclusion in critical areas such as employment discrimination. For example, the Viet Nam-based SE Virtualahan has identified situations of employment discrimination against persons with disabilities in the technology sector, and as a result, it has developed innovative job placement programmes for its graduates – persons with disabilities who also possess technological skills and qualifications. Today, Virtualahan partners with corporate tech giants and helps them to become fully inclusive.
- **Scalability:** Solutions put forth by SEs, as opposed to traditional charities or government services, are often scalable. For example, Project Dignity has expanded its food court business and other services in Singapore, and it has successfully replicated its model in Hong Kong. Project Dignity is actively planning to continue scaling up its services in Singapore and Hong Kong, as well as to other international locations.
- **Sustainability:** Being business-based, SEs are financially sustainable. For example, Alina Vision sets up surgery and vision centers that provide high-quality eye care services and prevent avoidable blindness. The Alina Vision center in Viet Nam offers services that patients must pay for, but rates are adjusted to be more affordable than other health centers and significantly lower or free for patients from low-income backgrounds.

SEs are currently making significant achievements, and yet a variety of barriers continue to impede their growth and impact. A number of structural barriers restrict the development of SEs, most notably the lack of clear regulation for SE incorporation in most ASEAN countries. This lack of clear regulation poses (i) administrative barriers for the structure and operation of SEs, (ii) funding barriers that make it challenging to pursue or receive investment capital or grants, as well as (iii) challenges related to taxation and property ownership. These issues significantly affect both the long-term vision and day-to-day operations of SEs. Moreover, legislation for the incorporation of SEs has been proposed in several ASEAN countries, but most of these have been suspended for significant periods of time (in some cases, for several years) as a result of unclear decision-making processes. The

development of SE incorporation is fundamental for the advancement of social innovation throughout ASEAN.

SEs supporting persons with disabilities face additional barriers for achieving the full potential of their social mission for inclusion, notably employment discrimination. Although most ASEAN countries have legislation protecting the right to equal employment and pay for persons with disabilities, some of them exhibit significant gaps in legislation. There is also a global lack of accountability mechanisms for implementing and enforcing the right to equal employment and pay, in addition to other disability rights. Some corporations exhibit a knowledge barrier, stating that they do not know how to become an inclusive workplace; they claim to be unaware of the legal requirements for inclusive employment, or of how to make the necessary changes to become an inclusive employer.

No one single actor can resolve all of these obstacles, but rather an ensemble of actors will be needed. It is evident that governments, philanthropists, and investors have the ability to create an enabling environment and support SEs such as by providing seed capital and investment resources. The following section outlines a 'Framework for Action' that includes key recommendations for five categories of stakeholders who can help unleash the potential of SEs and tackle disability in the ASEAN region.

3.2 Framework for action: Fostering social innovation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in ASEAN

Clear recommendations have emerged for various actors to foster the growth of SEs and help them fully realise their untapped potential to support persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN. These recommendations are for five categories of key stakeholders: (i) governments, (ii) investors, (iii) corporations, (iv) foundations and philanthropists, and (v) SEs and nongovernment organisations (NGOs).

Governments could significantly help advance social entrepreneurship that supports persons with disabilities by strengthening national regulatory frameworks related to SEs and disability rights.

There is a great need for a comprehensive review and development of national legislation for the incorporation of SEs throughout ASEAN. There is also a great need for the comprehensive review of national legislation for disability rights throughout ASEAN, including in the areas of equal employment, equal pay and benefits, accessibility standards, adapted transportation, and protection from abuse. In addition to comprehensive legislation, accountability mechanisms are needed to ensure that legislation is enforced. Governments could also improve access to healthcare for persons with disabilities and take measures to prevent avoidable disabilities, such as avoidable blindness. In terms of education and employment, governments could improve access to special education programmes for children and youth with disability, as well as to vocational training programmes for adults with a disability.

Investors could leverage both their analysis of potential investees and their investment capital to support SEs that promote inclusion in the ASEAN region. Investors could embed inclusion criteria into their investment screening and analysis in order to systematically ensure that their investment portfolio is comprised of companies with clear inclusion policies and practices. They could set measurable targets for investing in companies that implement fully inclusive policies and practices, and they could also consider investing in SEs or companies that offer impactful approaches to disability prevention or support to persons with disabilities. Investors are a key stakeholder for deploying more capital into the SE ecosystem, including SEs that support people with disabilities, which is currently an underrepresented area of investment. Investment capital can also be deployed to SEs that are led by persons with disabilities, which is an approach that corrects the underrepresentation of persons with disabilities in leadership roles and decision-making processes, and empowers more persons with disabilities as inclusion champions and advocates.

Corporations could significantly help to advance disability rights and inclusion by promoting the equal employment and pay of persons with disabilities. Corporations are a key stakeholder for combatting employment discrimination and achieving equal employment for persons with disabilities. Corporations have the option to create partnerships with SEs that can help them become fully inclusive employers and workplaces. Many SEs are also able to refer trainees and graduates of their training programmes for recruitment. Inclusive workplaces promote an empowering view of persons with disabilities within the corporate culture, rather than the historically disempowering view that overfocuses on charitable support or lack of certain abilities. It is highly recommended to develop buy-in for inclusion at all company levels, ranging from head leadership to middle management to support staff. To this end, extensive research is available on the benefits of inclusive workplaces.⁶

Foundations and philanthropists could leverage their funding and resources to strategically support SEs that promote inclusion in the ASEAN region. More funding could be provided to organisations supporting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities – an underrepresented social issue in the philanthropic sector. In particular, foundations and philanthropists could mobilise more funding to the SE ecosystem, including innovative and impactful SEs led by persons with disabilities. Foundations and philanthropists can help to promote an empowering view of persons with disabilities through their organisational policies, culture, and communications, rather than a disempowering view that has historically focused on charitable handouts. It is recommended for foundations and philanthropists provide unrestricted funding to SEs or NGOs rather than restricted project-level funding, which is a funding strategy that contributes more effectively to the organisation’s overall mission and impact.

⁶ Recommended resources include: Accenture, AAPD, and Disability:IN (2018), *Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage*. https://www.accenture.com/t20181029T185446Z_w_us-en_acnmedia/PDF-89/Accenture-Disability-Inclusion-Research-Report.pdf (access date); and Kalargyrou, V. (2014), Gaining a Competitive Advantage with Disability Inclusion Initiatives, *Journal of Human Resources in Hospitality & Tourism*, (13)2, pp.120–45.

SEs and NGOs could contribute to the advancement of disability rights and inclusion by ensuring the quality and impact of their programmes. SEs and NGOs are key stakeholders for continuing to promote the rights, inclusion, and empowerment of persons with disabilities through education, skill training, vocational training, career counseling, employment, coaching or counseling, and other impactful programmes. It is essential for SEs and NGOs to design and implement an impact measurement system to assess their performance and communicate their impact to other stakeholders. SEs and NGOs can ensure that they follow equal employment for persons with disabilities within their own organisations, including the representation of persons with disabilities in leadership roles and decision-making processes. SEs are well-positioned to offer consulting services to train companies to become inclusive employers; many SEs have already developed inclusivity training services that assess companies' needs and tailor inclusion training accordingly.

Table 3: Framework for Action

Categories of stakeholders	Recommendations
Governments	<p>Fostering inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive review of national legislation related to disability rights, including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equal employment; - Equal pay and benefits; - Accessibility standards; - Adapted transportation; and - Protection from abuse. • Accountability mechanisms to ensure enforcement. • Access to adequate healthcare and resources. • Prevention of avoidable disabilities (e.g., avoidable blindness). • Access to special education programmes for children and youth with disabilities. • Access to vocational training programmes for persons with disabilities.
	<p>Fostering social innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensive review of national legislation related to the incorporation of social enterprises. • Recognition of the public benefits delivered by SEs, as well as their untapped potential for increased social impact.
	<p>Good practices in the ASEAN region:</p> <p>In order to effectively implement disability rights as defined by the CRPD, the Singapore Government has introducing several Enabling Masterplans to establish clear targets and track its progress over time. The Singapore Government is currently nearing the end of its 3rd Enabling Masterplan that outlines the comprehensive inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout Singapore (ASEAN–DF, 2020).</p>

	<p>Viet Nam officially recognised social enterprises as a distinct legal entity through its Enterprise Law introduced in 2014. While stronger policy implementation may be needed to support social entrepreneurship in practice, Viet Nam’s legislation provides a useful model for the official recognition of social enterprises by government (UNESCAP, 2019b).</p>
<p>Investors</p>	<p>Fostering inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic review of the inclusion policies and practices of potential investees. • Targets for investing in inclusive companies.
	<p>Fostering social innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in SEs or companies with a social mission related to disability issues. • Investment in SEs or companies led by people with disabilities.
	<p>Good practices in the ASEAN region:</p> <p>The Disability Impact Fund invests in new technologies and innovations to scale market-based solutions that support persons with disabilities across Southeast Asia, China, and India. Today, the Disability Impact Fund focuses its investments on equal employment and assistive technology.</p>
<p>Corporations</p>	<p>Fostering inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal employment policies and practices for persons with disabilities. • Equal pay policies and practices for persons with disabilities. • Buy-in for inclusion at all company levels. • Empowering view of persons with disabilities within the corporate culture. • Accessibility standards, including transportation to the workplace.
	<p>Fostering social innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnerships with SEs that can support the development of an inclusive workplace. • Partnerships with SEs that can refer graduates from their training programmes for recruitment.
	<p>Good practices in the ASEAN region</p> <p>The Microsoft Enabler Program was established in 2020 to improve equal employment for persons with disabilities in the Asia–Pacific. The programme helps Microsoft employment partners become inclusive employers by receiving training from SEs and non-profits, and it facilitates the recruitment of persons with disabilities in the tech sector (Tech Wire Asia, 2020).</p>

Foundations/ Philanthropists	<p>Fostering inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowering view of persons with disabilities evident in organisational policies, culture, and communications. • Increased funding provided to SEs and NGOs supporting persons with disabilities.
	<p>Fostering social innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased funding for the SE ecosystem, especially SEs that are led by persons with disabilities. • Provision of unrestricted funding to support the organisation’s overall mission and impact (not project-specific funding).
	<p>Good practices in the ASEAN region</p> <p>The Fred Hollows Foundation, whose mission is to end avoidable blindness worldwide, directs significant funding to SEs across ASEAN, including Alina Vision in Vietnam. By mobilising funding to SEs that have a successful business model for generating income, The Foundation makes significant investments that positively impact both social entrepreneurship and disability issues.</p>
SEs and NGOs	<p>Fostering inclusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of innovative programmes focused on the rights, inclusion, and empowerment of persons with disabilities. • Representation of persons with disabilities in leadership roles and decision-making processes.
	<p>Fostering social innovation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of a high-quality impact measurement system to track objectives and progress. • Provision of consulting services to train other companies to become inclusive employers.
	<p>Good practices in the ASEAN region</p> <p>Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) is a non-profit and SE whose mission is to empower persons with intellectual disabilities and improve their quality of life. MINDS demonstrates best practices for other non-profits and SEs in this area through its innovative programmes and clear impact measurement, which enables it to achieve its mission and also form useful partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders.</p>

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, MINDS = Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore, NGOs = nongovernment organisations, SEs = social enterprises.

Source: Authors.

This ensemble of stakeholders can achieve tremendous advancement in social innovation and disability rights throughout ASEAN. Through a combination of targeted investments and strategic funding within an enabling regulatory environment, SEs can be empowered to unleash the full potential of their social missions. The achievements of many SEs have already begun to demonstrate the social innovation that is possible for the advancement of disability rights and inclusion across ASEAN. The support of all stakeholders is fundamental for harnessing this potential.