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Social Enterprises and Disability:

Fostering Innovation, Awareness, and Social
Impact in the ASEAN Region

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Social Enterprises and Disability: Fostering Innovation, Awareness, and Social Impact in the ASEAN Region

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Executive Summary

The rights and inclusion of people living with disability are critical and far-reaching issues for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States (AMS). It is estimated that one in every six people in Asia and the Pacific live with disability, or 690 million people throughout the Asia-Pacific region. These 690 million people include individuals with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, cognitive/developmental disabilities, and psychosocial disabilities. While the prevalence of certain disabilities varies amongst the 10 AMS, their citizens living with disability experience many of the same obstacles in accessing education, decent work, social protection services, and legal support. Persons with disabilities are subject to disproportionately high rates of poverty, and women and girls who live with disability face additional obstacles. While there are notable differences across the ASEAN region, we observe many similar challenges such as inadequate legislation, unequal employment, and inadequate physical access or adapted services.

Social enterprises (SEs) have emerged as key actors for developing new, innovative and scalable forms of support for persons with disabilities. Social entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon both worldwide and across the region, and SEs are uniquely positioned to provide solutions to some of the challenges facing persons with disabilities today – including effective responses to the significant issue of unequal employment. And yet, most AMS do not have a legal incorporation status for organisations that simultaneously pursue a social mission while carrying out profit-generating activities, with the notable exceptions of Viet Nam and Thailand. For this and other reasons, many of these SEs face legal and practical barriers to further expanding their positive impact on disability issues throughout the region.

By harnessing the untapped potential of SEs supporting persons with disabilities, ASEAN policymakers and other key stakeholders can achieve positive impact for both social entrepreneurship and disability rights throughout the region. Interviews were conducted with a range of SEs that are noteworthy for their support for persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN, and these interviews confirmed both (a) the tremendous potential for large-scale social innovation in the areas of inclusion and disability rights, as well as (b) the very limited support that these SEs currently receive from other key stakeholders. These interviews and additional research served as the basis for the findings presented in the Framework for Action.

The Framework for Action puts forth key findings and recommendations for governments, investors, corporations, foundations, philanthropists, SEs, and NGOs to strengthen their unique contributions to the advancement of inclusion and disability rights across ASEAN. Through the 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 Framework for Action also includes examples of existing good practices that demonstrate the positive impact that is already taking place across the region. Through strengthened support from all stakeholders, this positive impact can grow to protect the equality of persons with disabilities through fully inclusive economies and societies.

Chapter 1

Overview: Disability in the ASEAN region

1.1 Disability throughout ASEAN: Trends and challenges

People living with a disability comprise an estimated 15% of the global population and represent one of the largest minority groups in the world (UNESCAP, 2019a). The rights and inclusion of people living with a disability are a critical and far-reaching issue for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States (AMS). It is estimated that 1 in every 6 people in Asia and the Pacific – about 690 million people – live with a disability. This figure is expected to rise due to population aging, chronic health conditions, climate-related disasters, and other factors (UNESCAP, 2018). These 690 million people include individuals with physical disabilities; those who are blind or experience low vision, deaf, or hard-of-hearing; those with learning disabilities, cognitive/developmental disabilities, psychosocial disabilities, or are deaf-blind; and those with multiple disabilities.

It is estimated that 1 in every 6 people in Asia and the Pacific – about 690 million people – live with a disability.

Studies show that the GDP of Asia-Pacific countries could rise by 1 to 7% with disability-inclusive employment. Persons with disabilities are not adequately or fairly represented throughout the workforce in Asia and the Pacific, with evidence showing that persons with disabilities are systematically excluded from equal access to work across the region. According to UNESCAP, ‘When persons with disabilities work less or earn less because of the barriers they face, they accordingly contribute less to overall consumption and economic growth.’ Meanwhile, studies show that if persons with disabilities were paid on an equal basis as their colleagues without disabilities, the GDP of many Asian and Pacific countries could increase by 1 to 7% (UNESCAP, 2016).

While the prevalence of certain disabilities varies amongst the 10 AMS, their citizens living with disability experience many of the same barriers to equality. Many studies show that these individuals face similar obstacles throughout ASEAN in accessing education, decent work, social protection services, and legal support. They are also subject to disproportionately high rates of poverty, and women and girls who live with a disability face additional obstacles (UNESCAP, 2018). While there are notable differences across the ASEAN region, we observe many similar weaknesses such as inadequate legislation, unequal employment, and inadequate physical access or adapted services.

In recent decades, the disability rights movement has achieved a notable shift toward equal rights, inclusion, and empowerment of people living with disability. This is in stark contrast to the earlier, disempowering view that focused on charity and sympathy-driven support. Historically, social stigma and pity dominated societal responses to people who live with disability, rather than sound policies and programmes to support equal rights and well-being. While many regulatory frameworks have

emerged to reflect this new focus on equal rights, inclusion, and empowerment of people living with a disability, in many cases recent legislation has yet to be implemented and enforced in full.

Box 1.1: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Persons with Disabilities

Evidence shows that persons with disabilities have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Overall, persons with disabilities have experienced poorer health outcomes, lower access to education, reduced services and support, and increased violence and abuse throughout the pandemic. Evidence shows that persons with disabilities have disproportionately experienced:

- Higher rates of infection and death from COVID-19,
- Less access to healthcare and information,
- Worsened mental health,
- Lack of involvement in response planning,
- Loss of income and little or no financial assistance,
- Reduced access to disability support and services,
- Increased gender-based violence, and
- Inaccessible remote learning (Australian Aid et al., 2021).

It is crucial that COVID-19 response and recovery programmes appropriately prioritise persons with disabilities in their efforts. To this end, it is highly recommended that more public and private funding be mobilised for SEs and other organisations that directly support persons with disabilities. Such funding can support the full inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in addition to addressing additional hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.2 Stakeholders: Public and private actors in the disability rights and inclusion landscape

A wide range of key stakeholders work at the international, regional, national, and local levels to protect the equal rights of persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN. The following table presents some of these key actors according to their organisation type, notable for their significant work for the advancement of persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN. The purpose of the table is not to provide an exhaustive list, but to offer an overview of some of the key actors and how they can be categorised.

Table 1: Overview of Key Stakeholders by Sector or Organisation Type*

Type of organisation	Name and brief description
International organisations	<p>UN Programme on Disability – Designated UN agency promoting the rights and advancement of persons with disabilities worldwide, also serving as the secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.</p> <p>UNESCAP – Leader of initiatives such as the Asian and Pacific Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2013–2022) and the Incheon Strategy to ‘Make the Right Real’ for persons with disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.</p>
ASEAN and regional Organisations	<p>ASEAN Disability Forum (ASEAN-DF) – A network composed of the disabled persons’ organisations (DPOs) of AMS. The ASEAN-DF serves as a platform for DPOs to coordinate advocacy for disability inclusive policy formulation and implementation.</p> <p>Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability – A regional platform for major disability-related networks based in Thailand.</p>

<p>National ministries (or equivalent national entities)**</p>	<p>Brunei Darussalam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education <p>Cambodia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans, and Youth Rehabilitation • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports • Ministry of Rural Development <p>Indonesia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Social Affairs • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education and Culture <p>Lao PDR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare • Ministry of Public Health • Ministry of Education <p>Malaysia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education <p>Myanmar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education <p>Philippines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Council on Disability Affairs • Department of Health • Department of Education <p>Singapore</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Social and Family Development • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education <p>Thailand</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Social Development and Human Security • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education <p>Viet Nam</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs • Ministry of Health • Ministry of Education and Training
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Universities and research institutes	<p>Asian Institute of Disability & Development – Institute conducting research, capacity building, and advocacy to promote inclusion,, based at the University of South Asia, Dhaka, Bangladesh.</p> <p>Australia–Indonesia Disability Research and Advocacy Network (AIDRAN) – Network of Australian and Indonesian disability advocates, researchers, and practitioners who promote broader social inclusion through interdisciplinary research on disability and social inclusion, and evidence-informed, disability-inclusive policy.</p> <p>Disability Research and Capacity Development – Research and training institute based in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.</p> <p>Brawijaya University Center for Disability Studies and Services – Major university research center based in Malang, Indonesia.</p> <p>Social Service Institute of Singapore – A key research division under the National Council of Social Service of Singapore.</p>
Non-profits	<p>Humanity & Inclusion (H&I) – Formerly known as Handicap International, H&I is one of the world’s largest international non-profits dedicated to supporting people with disabilities.</p> <p>Action on Disability and Development (ADD) – International non-profit based in the United Kingdom, supporting programmes in Cambodia and other ASEAN nations.</p> <p>Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) – Leading non-profit supporting persons with disabilities in Singapore.</p> <p>The Fred Hollows Foundation – An Australian non-profit focused on ending avoidable blindness in more than 25 countries worldwide.</p> <p>Christian Blind Mission (CBM) – An international non-profit with an Asia Regional Hub Office located in Bangkok, Thailand. CBM’s mission is to promote inclusion and prevent blindness.</p>
Private sector stakeholders	<p>Singtel – A founding member of the Singapore Business Network on DisAbility, Singtel provides adapted technology through its Enabling Innovation Centre to promote inclusive employment.</p> <p>SAP – German multinational software corporation that promotes neurodiversity in the workplace through its worldwide Autism Inclusion Network and Pledge.</p> <p>Microsoft Asia – Through the Microsoft Enabler Program, Microsoft works with SEs and non-profits to improve inclusive employment in Asia–Pacific.</p>

Foundations and impact investors	<p>Disability Rights Fund (DRF) & Disability Rights Advocacy Fund (DRAF) – Grantmaker and grantmaking collaborative between donors and non-profits that promote disability rights worldwide.</p> <p>Open Society Foundations – Foundation supporting non-profits that promote full equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities in their communities.</p> <p>Disability Impact Fund – Invests in new technologies and innovations to scale market-based solutions to reach millions of persons with disabilities throughout Asia.</p>
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AMS = ASEAN Member States, ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, ASEAN-DF = ASEAN Disability Forum, CBM = Christian Blind Mission, DPO = disabled persons' organisations, H&I = Humanity & Inclusion, SEs = social enterprises, UN = United Nations, UNESCAP = United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Notes: *This table provides an overview of key stakeholders, not a comprehensive list of all or most stakeholders supporting persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN. These key stakeholders are notable for their visibility and/or achievements in supporting the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN. ** This section includes the Ministries that have a mandate or focus on supporting persons with disabilities in their respective countries but it does not include every national Ministry supporting persons with disabilities or the specific Departments they oversee.

Source: Various sources compiled by authors.

1.3 Legal frameworks: Laws and regulations impacting disability in the ASEAN region

A wide range of international, regional, and national regulatory frameworks is in place to protect the rights of persons with disabilities in ASEAN today. The highest level and most comprehensive international and regional frameworks include:

- **The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** is the foremost UN Convention to ensure the rights of persons with disabilities worldwide. The CRPD entered into force in 2008 and has 164 signatories today, including all 10 AMS (UNCRPD, 2008). The CRPD is frequently referenced as the fundamental regulatory framework for the protection of persons with disabilities.
- **The UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (PRPD) Strategic Operational Framework 2020–2025** was put forth by the UNPRPD in order to support the implementation of the CRPD and address key developments in today's disability inclusion landscape (UNPRPD, 2020).
- **The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** specifically includes persons with disabilities (as well as 'persons in vulnerable situations') in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while the **UN Disability and Development Report** provides specific, evidence-based recommendations to promote the realisation of the SDGs for persons with disabilities (UN DESA, 2018a).

- **The Incheon Strategy** is a framework for the Asia–Pacific region that provided the first set of 10 regionally agreed disability-specific development goals, 27 targets, and 62 indicators to enhance the implementation of the CRPD towards achieving the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- **The ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025** was put forth by the ASEAN Secretariat to reaffirm all 10 AMS' commitments to disability inclusion, especially regarding specific CRPD commitments (ASEAN, 2019).

While all 10 AMS have officially ratified the CRPD and other regulatory frameworks at the international or regional levels, legislation at the national level varies widely amongst the Member States and comprehensive legislation is still needed to protect the rights of persons with disabilities and achieve full inclusion. In particular, national legislation on the right to equal employment for persons with disabilities varies significantly amongst ASEAN and reveals certain gaps in legal protection of the right to equal employment. In countries where comprehensive legislation already protects the right to equal employment, employment discrimination still occurs and robust accountability mechanisms need to be developed.

Box 1.2: National Legislation for Disability Rights in the ASEAN Region

National legislation for disability rights varies widely amongst the 10 Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States (AMS). Although all 10 of the AMS have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), certain Member States have adopted more comprehensive national legislation than others. Even in nations that have ratified more comprehensive national legislation, there may be a lack of legal enforcement that hinders the effective protection of disability rights. In particular, employment discrimination continues to be a serious issue throughout ASEAN, but this can be improved through legislation.

Singapore provides a useful case study of an ASEAN Member State that has already achieved significant advancements for disability inclusion, and for which certain advancements can still be made. The Singapore Government has ratified and adopted a series of legislative acts, including the first Enabling Masterplan to ensure an inclusive society in 2007. Singapore then ratified the CRPD in 2013, and it has since adopted the second and third Enabling Masterplans to ensure the full achievement of its goals for a fully inclusive society. And yet, according to the ASEAN Disability Forum in 2020, 'To ensure and promote the full realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities, the Singapore Government would have to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that discriminate against persons with disabilities' (ASEAN–DF, 2020). The Disabled People's Association of Singapore has highlighted the low employment rate of persons with disabilities in Singapore today and offered solutions that the Singapore Government can adopt.

Overall, Singapore has achieved significant advancements through legislation to protect persons with disabilities since 2007, and its Enabling Masterplans have put forth clear targets and indicators that may serve as a useful reference for other AMS. Singapore can continue to make further advancements to achieve a fully inclusive society, notably for the equal employment of persons with disabilities. Social enterprises have emerged to help address this need for equal employment across ASEAN, ultimately contributing innovative solutions that could provide useful support to further legislative advancements.

Chapter 2

The Role of Social Enterprises (SEs) in Supporting Persons with Disabilities in the ASEAN region

2.1 The rise of SEs throughout ASEAN

In a context that is often characterised by inadequate policy protection and private sector inaction, social enterprises have emerged as key actors for their capacity to identify new solutions and foster inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. According to the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA), a social enterprise is ‘a form of entrepreneurship which predominantly focuses on social benefits rather than solely financial ones, and which seeks to address societal, cultural or environmental issues, often in an innovative b’ (UN DESA, 2018b). In essence, a social enterprise is comprised of both a social mission and a for-profit business model, though many definitions of social enterprises vary in terms of how the social mission and for-profit business model are combined and structured.

A social enterprise is ‘a form of entrepreneurship which predominantly focuses on social benefits rather than solely financial ones, and which seeks to address societal, cultural or environmental issues, often in an innovative manner’ (UN DESA, 2018b).

Social entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon both worldwide and within ASEAN. In many ASEAN countries, social entrepreneurship has built upon the evolving history of cooperatives and shown tremendous growth in recent years. In Singapore, for example, over 90% of existing social enterprises have been established since 2010, with an estimated 67% of all social enterprises having been operational for less than 5 years (British Council and the Singapore Centre for Social Enterprise, raISE Ltd., 2020). In Indonesia, over 70% of social enterprises were established in the past 5 years (British Council et al., 2020a). In Thailand, the government introduced a social enterprise promotion policy in 2010 (British Council et al., 2020b).

The rise of social enterprises in the region reflects both a need for social innovation and the growing demand for purpose-driven enterprises, especially amongst millennial consumers. According to the World Economic Forum, 40% of millennials believe that the goal of business should be ‘to improve society’, and millennials make up 40% of all consumers today, influencing about US\$40 billion in sales (World Economic Forum, 2019). A significant number of social enterprises focus on the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities, showing tremendous potential for advancing equal rights.

Box 2: Defining Social Enterprises in the ASEAN Region

Social enterprises (SEs) take different forms in various ASEAN countries, in terms of both legal status and practice. SEs have grown significantly throughout Southeast Asia in recent years. Yet, there is still a lack of legal incorporation status for organisations that simultaneously pursue a social mission while carrying out profit-generating business activities, with the notable exception of Viet Nam which officially recognised SEs under its Enterprise Law in 2014 (British Council et al., 2018). Thailand also has a legal definition for SEs, but qualifying as a SE in Thailand has been described as a prohibitively difficult process.

SEs in most ASEAN countries must therefore resort to weighing the various options available to them for legal incorporation, which each carry different legal and financial implications (e.g., related to taxes, fundraising, property ownership, and others). These SEs generally fall under one of the following de facto models:

- **Non-profit, charity, or foundation registration status**, wherein the organisation’s social services evolve to include revenue generation (often in addition to traditional fundraising).
- **Enterprise, company, or business incorporation**, wherein the organisation provides social services in addition to its for-profit business activities.

The uncertain legal definition of SEs is one of the main challenges hampering their development. Although SEs achieve both income-generation and the delivery of essential social services, they face extensive challenges related to the administration of their organisational structures. The lack of clear SE incorporation places limits on either the income-generating activities pursued by organisations registered as non-profits, or it restricts the social services offered by organisations incorporated as companies.

2.2 Overview of SEs supporting persons with disabilities in the ASEAN region

A growing number of SEs are supporting persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN today. According to the *State of Social Enterprise in South East Asia* published by UNESCAP and the British Council in 2021, up to 1 million SEs are tackling social and environmental problems across Southeast Asia today (British Council et al., 2021). These social problems include the right to equal employment for persons with disabilities, which is a common focus for the skills training and employment programmes provided by SEs throughout Southeast Asia today. There are also many non-profits supporting persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN, many of which are increasingly pursuing the income-generating models practiced by SEs.

Up to 1 million social enterprises are tackling social and environmental problems across Southeast Asia today.

These SEs support persons with diverse types of disabilities, and they work across all sectors of the economy. SEs throughout ASEAN address all forms of disability, including physical, intellectual, and mental disabilities. While certain SEs focus on a specific type of disability for specialised support, other SEs provide support to persons with all disabilities in the aim of fostering a larger community for inclusion. These SEs also work across diverse sectors, ranging from the technology sector to the health sector and the hospitality industry. In the technology sector, notable SEs train persons with disabilities in technological skills that increase the individual's employability and potential for higher-earning income while in the hospitality industry, a significant number of SEs train persons with disabilities in the skills needed to work in high-performing restaurants, coffeeshops, and bakeries. Many SEs also provide consulting services to help companies become inclusive employers. These services are highly useful for advancing equal employment in practice, and SEs are often able to refer graduates from their own training programmes for recruitment.





Various trends can be identified for the SEs throughout ASEAN, including the need for more advanced government support for equal employment of persons with disabilities. While the national regulations protecting disability rights vary greatly amongst the 10 AMS, the overall level of government support is not yet sufficiently advanced, particularly with regard to equal employment opportunities and practices for persons with disabilities. The right to employment remains a critical issue throughout the region which could be addressed significantly through improvements in legislation. Corporations also play a crucial role in achieving equal employment and becoming inclusive employers that enforce inclusive business practices. In this context of unequal employment, SEs have emerged as key players providing useful solutions by (a) developing high-quality skills training, job placement, and coaching programmes for persons with disabilities, and (b) offering consulting services to assist government and corporations to become inclusive employers. Many of these impactful SEs are led and operated by persons with disabilities – these social entrepreneurs champion disability rights while making significant contributions toward inclusive employment and, ultimately, inclusive societies.





Case studies were carried out to illustrate innovation by and impact of notable SEs supporting persons with disabilities across the ASEAN region. These case studies included in-depth reviews of specific SE models, identification of common strengths and challenges amongst SEs, and recommendations for stakeholders who wish to support the nascent SE movement.

2.3 Case Studies

The 8 SEs presented here provide clear examples of how the power of social entrepreneurship can positively impact persons with disabilities throughout ASEAN. These SEs have been selected based on a comprehensive mapping exercise which identified the key stakeholders supporting persons with disabilities throughout all 10 AMS, with a focus on active SEs and non-profits whose express mission is to support persons with disabilities. These case studies offer examples of the distinct role that SEs can play in terms of fostering inclusion for persons with disabilities through solutions and business models that are sustainable, scalable, and often highly innovative. These case studies also provide insights into the significant challenges or obstacles that may keep SEs from realising their full potential.

Table 2: Social Enterprises (SEs) Interviewed for the Study

Name of SE	Description
<p>Alina Vision Viet Nam</p> 	<p>Alina Vision aims to prevent and treat avoidable blindness and vision impairment in emerging markets by delivering affordable eye care, including targeting those excluded from mainstream healthcare systems, particularly low-income individuals and women. Alina sets up surgery and vision centers and applies principles of the Affordable Eye Care Model, a social enterprise model that makes this high-quality eye care accessible and affordable.</p> <p>www.alinavision.com</p>
<p>Epic Arts Cambodia</p> 	<p>Epic Arts is an arts organisation that provides inclusive education, community, and social enterprise programmes. Epic Arts is led by Onn Sokny, a woman with a disability. Over 50% of their full-time staff also have a disability. Their social enterprise programmes include the Epic Arts Café, which serves an average of 20,000 customers each year.</p> <p>http://epicarts.org.uk</p>
<p>Fingertalk Indonesia</p> 	<p>Fingertalk provides equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities, especially deaf people. According to Fingertalk, 74% of deaf people in Indonesia are unemployed due to stigma and communication barriers. Fingertalk has created six fully inclusive social enterprise entities: two cafes, a bakery, two sewing workshops, and a carwash. In addition to providing training and employment for these social enterprise entities, Fingertalk has also delivered vocational training to more than 1,000 underserved women and youth since 2015.</p> <p>https://finger-talk.com</p>
<p>Kerjabilitas Indonesia</p> 	<p>Kerjabilitas is the largest job search platform in Indonesia that facilitates employment for persons with disabilities. Since 2015, the Kerjabilitas platform has served over 12,000 job seekers and assisted recruitment for more than 2,000 companies looking to hire. Kerjabilitas also provides consulting services for companies to become fully inclusive employers.</p> <p>https://kerjabilitas.com</p>

<p>Project Dignity Singapore</p>  <p>Project Dignity</p>	<p>Project Dignity provides vocational training and employment opportunities to people with disabilities. According to Project Dignity, only 5 out of every 100 people with a disability in Singapore are employed. Amongst its various activities and services, Project Dignity has created a large food hall to train and employ people with disabilities. The social enterprise has trained more than 1,000 people with disabilities since it was founded in 2015, and it also operates in Hong Kong.</p> <p>https://projectdignity.sg</p>
<p>REACH Viet Nam Viet Nam</p>  <p>REACH For your Future</p>	<p>REACH Viet Nam provides vocational training, career counseling, and job placement services for Viet Nam's most underserved youth, including people with disability. Since 2004, REACH has trained more than 18,000 underserved youth and partnered with over 1,000 employers. More than 80% of their graduates have found a job after their training. REACH has also created an inclusive business entity called Viewzz, a real-estate visual firm that employs REACH graduates.</p> <p>https://reach.org.vn, www.viewzz-studio.com</p>
<p>Steps with Theera Thailand</p>  <p>Steps with THEERA</p>	<p>Steps with Theera aims to achieve equality and inclusion for people with intellectual differences by operating vocational training centers and coffee shops. Their team of specialists and therapists provide in-depth training and support to their trainees, and they offer inclusive employment opportunities at their coffee shops. Steps with Theera partners with over 20 businesses as employers for its graduates, and they provide consulting services on inclusion.</p> <p>https://stepswiththeera.com</p>
<p>Virtualahan The Philippines</p>  <p>Virtualahan Inc.</p>	<p>Virtualahan equips persons with disabilities with practical and essential skills to become competitive and economically independent in the technology sector. Virtualahan was founded by Ryan Gervasa in 2015, an Ashoka Fellow living with a disability himself. Over 500 people have graduated from Virtualahan's 5-week skills training programme since 2015, and more than 66% of these graduates have secured gainful employment.</p> <p>https://virtualahan.com</p>

SE = social enterprise.

Source: Various websites mentioned above, accessed 5 July 2021.

Most of these SEs are led by young social entrepreneurs, many of whom are persons with disabilities themselves. Trends in social entrepreneurship worldwide have shown the growing emergence of young leaders. Numerous studies show that young people today are highly motivated to generate positive social change and interested in developing innovative solutions through social entrepreneurship (UN DESA, 2020). In addition to the strong presence of young leaders in this ecosystem, another pattern that can be identified relates to the importance of supporting persons with disabilities in championing their own cause. Persons with disabilities have considerable assets to leverage in advocating for disability rights, including first-hand knowledge of their needs and the ability to develop effective solutions to social problems. These highly driven social entrepreneurs are well-positioned to address the need for stronger disability rights across ASEAN:

‘We are beyond the “Good for Business Case” that it’s good for companies to hire people with disabilities. True inclusion is when you build mechanisms for persons with disabilities – and anyone – to thrive, including in the workplace.’

– Ryan Gersava, Founder and President of Virtualahan¹

‘We need to understand that disabilities are a “human rights issue”.’

– Dissa Ahdanisa, Founder and CEO of Fingertalk²

Due to the need to address employment inequality throughout ASEAN, many SEs across the region focus their mission on supporting equal employment pathways. The majority of SEs supporting persons with disabilities in ASEAN have one or more of the following objectives: (i) to provide education, skills or training to persons with disabilities, (ii) to create jobs and provide direct employment for persons with disabilities, and (iii) to support the employment or job placement of persons with disabilities with external companies and organisations. The case studies revealed several different strategies for achieving this mission as well as a wide range of employment sectors. Steps with Theera provides work-readiness training with a focus on restaurant and coffee shop skills, whereas REACH Viet Nam has created the Viewzz social enterprise which provides training and employment related to visual design for real estate businesses. Kerjabilitas focuses its work on facilitating job placement and recruitment through its major online platform devoted to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. SEs provide training, experience, and employment opportunities that are essential for achieving inclusive employment across ASEAN.

¹ This is a direct quotation from our interview with Ryan Gersava on 17 May 2021. The interview was conducted by Senior Impact Advisor Allison Sanders on behalf of ERIA/Impact46.

² This is a direct quotation from our interview with Ryan Gersava on 17 May 2021. The interview was conducted by Senior Impact Advisor Allison Sanders on behalf of ERIA/Impact46.

In addition to direct support to persons with disabilities, many SEs throughout ASEAN also assist companies in becoming inclusive employers with accessible workplaces. Several of the SEs interviewed have developed consulting services for helping companies become inclusive employers and assisting them in adapting their systems and workplaces accordingly. Although ASEAN currently exhibits a tremendous gap in the equal employment of persons with disabilities, Virtualahan founder Ryan Gersava observes, ‘more companies are more ready than they initially thought to employ people with disabilities.’³ Kerjabilitas, Project Dignity, Steps with Theera, and Virtualahan have developed consulting services for corporate employers – services which they believe have significant potential for expansion in the future. These SEs also provide valuable assistance by recommending their own trainees and graduates for recruitment, which significantly facilitates the recruitment process for companies.

*‘More companies are more ready than they initially thought
to employ people with disabilities.’*

– Ryan Gersava, Founder and President of Virtualahan⁴

Many SEs throughout ASEAN provide high-performing, competitive services. SEs face the two-fold challenge of achieving both social impact and profitability. Most of these SEs interviewed for this study did in fact generate year-on-year profit and growth, but also demonstrated remarkable achievements in their respective industries. In 2020, Virtualahan was selected by Microsoft to provide expertise on inclusive employment to technology companies in the Asia–Pacific. Due to the quality of its services in the restaurant and food delivery market in Singapore, Project Dignity received funding to replicate its work in Hong Kong. As Project Dignity Founder Koh Seng Choon explains, ‘We’re successful because we make great food – not because we’re part-charity.’⁵

The key findings from these case studies illustrate the great potential that SEs have for improving disability rights across ASEAN. They improve the representation of young people and persons with disabilities in their leadership and staff positions, and they address priority issues, such as unequal employment throughout ASEAN. These SEs demonstrate great innovation through their consulting services that assist corporations to become inclusive employers, and they also demonstrate strong business performance. Overall, these SEs illustrate the tremendous potential for social innovation that could be greatly enhanced by support from other stakeholders in the region.

³ This is a direct quotation from our interview with Ryan Gersava on 17 May 2021. The interview was conducted by Senior Impact Advisor Allison Sanders on behalf of ERIA/Impact46.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ This is a direct quotation from our interview with Koh Seng Choon on 20 April 2021, conducted by Allison Sanders on behalf of ERIA/Impact46.

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><i>Fostering inclusion:</i></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><i>Fostering social innovation:</i></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><i>Good practices in the ASEAN region:</i></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>
Investors	<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>
Corporations	<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.

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