Introduction

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In the past, attitudes towards disability focussed on dependence, highlighting what people with disabilities cannot do. Disability is, in itself, a word with a negative prefix; it negates ability. People with disabilities have borne the brunt of mistreatment, prejudice, and pity, often excluded from full participation in society. While strides have been made, much still needs to change in terms of access, attitudes, representation, and ultimately inclusion. Some disability rights advocates reject the label 'people with disabilities',[1] preferring instead to remind us that we are all people with different abilities. Others fully embrace the word 'disabled' and the shared disabled experience, insisting that it is not a bad word. Indeed, they see the societal challenges that they face as more disabling than their actual disability (Tame, 2022). Whatever the label, people with disabilities are often innovators, breaking with the norm to find solutions, as they are often faced with barriers that others do not face.[2]

Box 1. Attitudes towards Disability

Attitudes are crucial. The way that people with disabilities are viewed by their families, communities, society, and governments directly impacts their life outcomes and their inclusion. Discrimination and prejudice towards people with disabilities are referred to as 'disablism'. Disability rights advocates are increasingly calling out 'ableism', which emphasises discrimination in favour of people without disabilities. Two key models of disability are often cited in disability studies, although other models do exist:

(i) **Medical model.** Focussed on a person's physical or intellectual impairments – i.e. what is perceived to be 'wrong' with the person – this traditional model spotlights the need to treat or cure a disability. Seeing people as disabled by their impairments, it promotes dependence and discrimination.

(ii) **Social model**. Developed as a direct rejection of the medical model, the social model holds that people with disabilities are disabled by barriers presented by society and their environments, not by their impairments. It is a 'socio-cultural rather than biological construct' (Lang, 2007). For instance, the fact that a person with a disability cannot access public transport is a problem with the design of the public transport, not with the person. While the social model has a number of different forms associated with various countries and has been heavily criticised, it has helped change the discourse around disability, challenging deep-rooted misconceptions and inspiring political activism (Owens, 2014).

Inclusion is not possible without the full participation and representation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life, especially at a policy level. As South African disability rights activists advocated

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[1] Chua, D. (2022), interview, 8 June.
[2] Research suggests that individuals with disabilities have enhanced abilities compared to others. The brain rewires itself as a result of the loss of one sense and compensates with heightened abilities in other senses (Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, 2017).

in the 1990s, 'Nothing about us without us.' Key to this change is mind-set, as the global movement WeThe15 points out, people with disabilities are no different from anyone else.

Sources: Scope, Disablism and Ableism, https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/disablism/ (accessed 15 August 2022); and Scope, Social Model of Disability, https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability/ (accessed 15 August 2022).

This report examines the role that digital technology has played and can play in addressing some of the barriers faced by people with disabilities, accelerating the progress towards their inclusion and economic empowerment. It examines the evolving technology-enabled working environment, promise of digital jobs as technology companies and information and communications technology-intensive sectors recognise the key skill sets of people with disabilities, role of technology in education, as well as technology improving the lives of people with disabilities. This report shares concrete case studies, innovations, and best practices emerging in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region. It uses the term 'people with disabilities' due to its widespread use and as the official terminology used by frameworks such as the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.