



Lar the 'hidden' adolescent girl With disabilities in Lao PDR

Lar is Noi's cousin and lives in the same village as Noi. She is 11 years old and has a disability. She is a friendly girl and likes to be around people. Lar's parents are poor and cannot make ends meet and they have 4 other children besides Lar. Her parents do not know why Lar is different from their other children. They have not taken her to a medical centre as they cannot afford the costs they would incur. They are also ashamed for Lar to be seen by the community because they feel that Lar's disability reflects on them. Lar speaks and is generally a friendly child but her speech is not very clear and over time her parents and her siblings have learnt to understand her. Lar does not always understand everything that is said to her and has difficulty following instructions. Lar's parents do not send her to school because they do not think that Lar will learn anything and it will be a waste of money.

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims for equitable and inclusive development that leaves no one behind.
- Lar and other adolescent girls like Lar are at higher risk & being left behind.
- Lar context is not unique Global & regional research studies disability reports, show that adolescent girls with disabilities are more vulnerable and require an effort to not be left behind.

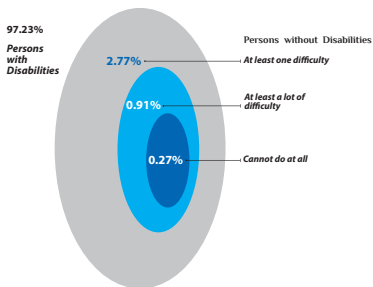
Why adolescent girl like Lar are invisible and hidden

- Lack of accurate data
- Attitude of society towards persons with disabilities
- Lack of knowledge and or availability of adequate
- Girls and women with disabilities are less likely to have a platform to voice their concerns.



Lack of accurate data:

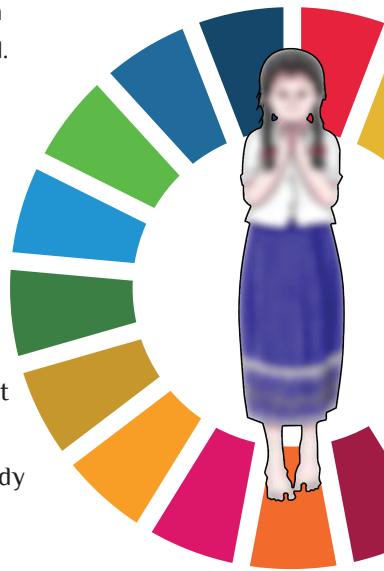
- Lao PDR made a really good start in using the Washington Group of Questions (WG-SS) – the short set – in the Population and Housing Census 2015 (PHC). The data collected on disability showed a prevalence of 2.77% and this does not reflect the average prevalence rates reported by the World Report on Disability, 2011 which is 15.6% ranging from 11.8% in higher income countries and 18% in lower income countries.
- The reason for this discrepancy in prevalence rates is the lack of adequate training provided to enumerators for the PHC in the use of the WGSS. Without accurate data on disability, people are not even accounted for and this results in governments' inability to include them in their planning for health, education, livelihoods, employment services.



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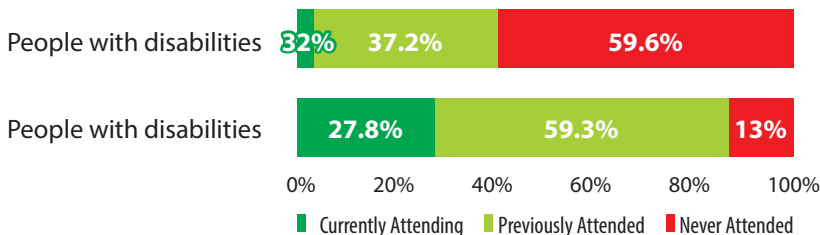
Attitude towards persons with disabilities

- Negative perceptions of persons with disabilities in society makes it difficult for girls like Lar to be included.
- Some families do not believe that girls like Lar have any rights.
- The language used to describe persons with disabilities is discriminatory and so girls like Lar internalize this negativity.
- The stereotypes used are negative – that girls like Lar are not capable of doing anything.
- The cultural belief of 'karma' not just affects Lar but also her family as they are all ostracized by society.
- They face double discrimination thus double jeopardy that of being an adolescent girl and having a disability.



Parents, the community and service providers do not know how to include girls like Lar

- There is no awareness of the needs of adolescent girls like Lar and there is also a belief that they do not require services.
- Parents and communities do not understand or have the knowledge about rights of adolescent girls with disabilities.
- So they do not get enrolled into school, if they do get enrolled then teachers do not know how to ensure their learning needs are met.



- Health, education, employment services do not have the understanding nor the capacity to meet the needs of girls like Lar. Until this capacity is improved and there is sensitization of service providers regarding the assessment, identification and specific needs of adolescent girls with disabilities, girls like Lar will continue to face barriers, be marginalized and will not be able to access services provided to the general population. As these barriers get removed, Lar starts to become more visible.

How do we remove these barriers?

- Now that Lao PDR has ratified UNCRPD, it now needs to be implemented taking into consideration the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The National Disability Policy, Strategy and Action Plan need to be approved and implemented.
- the National Strategy and Action Plan need to be resourced adequately.
- Improve data collection of persons with disabilities following international standards by using the Washington Group of Questions.

- Disability inclusion should be on everyone's agenda
- Follow the principles of "Nothing about us without us" and "Leave no one behind".
- Parents, communities and service providers need to be made aware of the rights of adolescent girls with disabilities
- Education, health and employment services need their capacity to be developed so they know how to include adolescent girls with disabilities in their services.
- Further research should be carried out on the needs of adolescent girls with disabilities.

Lar becomes visible when we remove the barriers she faces



1. World Health Organisation and the World Bank (2011) World Report on Disability WHO: Geneva pg.27

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