



# Lessons Learned

## Economic Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities in the West Bank

Persons with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or economically inactive and thus, at greater risk of poverty. In Palestine, Johanniter and the Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation (BASR) joined forces in 2013 to implement a 3 year project to promote the economic empowerment of persons with disabilities in the West Bank. The project was supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The key lessons learned from this project are as follows:

### Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

#### • Art. 27 Work and Employment

*"... right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities"*

- Palestine acceded to the CRPD on 2 April 2014

✓ Sustainable economic empowerment of persons with disabilities requires an integrated approach that involves the local (policy) context: The project was not confined to persons with disabilities but also targeted service providers (e.g. vocational training centres), institutions (e.g. Chambers of Commerce and Industry), policy makers (e.g. the Ministry of Labor) and the public. This way, it was possible to address different social, institutional and environmental barriers that limit access of persons with disabilities to work.

✓ Participation of persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of economic empowerment programs is vital to ensure that they address their needs and priorities. The cooperation with local and national Disabled People's Organisations (DPO) (e.g. the Palestinian General Union of Persons with Disabilities) helped to reach persons with disabilities. It also enabled the project to promote persons with disabilities' right to work at different levels and develop DPOs' advocacy capacities in this regard.

✓ Poor access to (formal) education and training is a key driver of the economic exclusion of persons with disabilities. Economic empowerment programs should therefore facilitate their access to vocational training and skills development to increase their employability or enable them to become self-employed. This requires no special training facilities: The project successfully cooperated with mainstream public and private vocational training centers but the experience highlighted the need to lobby and support them to make their services accessible for persons with disabilities.

✓ To be able to effectively access skills development and (self-) employment opportunities, interventions need to address the broad spectrum of obstacles and offer additional life skills education and rehabilitative support to persons with disabilities: The project provided safe and affordable transport, covered transport costs, improved/adapted communication and training methodologies in the VT centers, facilitated provision of assistive devices and reasonable accommodations and provided psychosocial support – a holistic approach to address complex interconnected barriers.

✓ Negative attitudes and poor family support are major obstacles for the economic participation of persons with disabilities. Changing practices and beliefs requires a mix of awareness raising approaches: The project used information and education materials (posters, brochures, guidelines on disability-inclusive employment), TV spots and workshops to address media, employers, micro-financing organizations, Palestinian Insurance Federation, students, vocational training centers, private institutions, CBR programs, Chambers of Commerce & Industry, municipalities, NGOs and the public. It is vital to use a rights-based approach to disability and consider context and experiences of the target groups in the design and choice of the awareness raising activities.

✓ Women with disabilities are less likely to participate in economic empowerment programs. The same applies to persons with intellectual and mental disabilities, especially in rural areas. The project highlighted the need to address intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage, and include measures to ensure that the perspectives of particularly marginalised persons are included in all program aspects and awareness raising activities. Information about such programs must be made available and accessible to these groups and support for more complex needs provided.

✓ Due to the absence of disability mainstreaming approaches in (non-) governmental and private sector institutions, persons with disabilities are often not considered in the design and implementation of economic empowerment programs. Partnerships with vocational training centers, micro-finance institutes, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and employment offices and continuous follow-up promoted positive dynamics and ownership for disability inclusion at different levels.

✓ A combination of different methods and approaches that provides room for individual solutions proved more effective than a one-size fits all approach: The project successfully combined career counselling, vocational training, small business management training, micro loans as well as support for job placements with private sector employers. Close follow-up proved essential as well as a follow-up plan for VT trainees who complete their training after the project ends.

**Contact:**

- Anette Müller, Desk Officer South/Central Asia, Middle East & Europe, Johanniter, Email: [Anette.Mueller@johanniter.de](mailto:Anette.Mueller@johanniter.de)
- Rima Canawati, Director of Program Development Bethlehem Arab Society for Rehabilitation, Email: [Rima@basr.org](mailto:Rima@basr.org)