

SAYING YES TO CHANGE



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DEVELOPING AND ADOPTING MODELS AS POLICIES

THE PIONEER IN DEVELOPING AND APPLYING UNIVERSAL DESIGN CRITERIA FOR TRANSPORT IN VIETNAM



Universal design for transport or transport for all is a global transport development trend. It is the synchronous development of both infrastructure and means of transport, along with support mechanisms to facilitate everyone's safe and convenient travel with specific regulations.

In Vietnam, although there are different documents about ensuring accessible transport for persons with disabilities, it can be easily seen that policies have focused on ticket exemption and discounts, improvement in infrastructure and means of transport, rather than enhancing knowledge and skills of those who directly support persons with disabilities. The investment in development and renovation of infrastructure and means of transport has not been undertaken synchronously as specified in the existing persons with disabilities support programs. According to the “Assessing the accessibility of transport in several localities and the upgradation of the accessible transport systems” report by ACDC in 2019 in the framework of “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project funded by USAID, “accessibility is not ensured in bus stops and shelters in Quang Tri Province; only 4 out of 19 bus stations in Quang Nam Province provide accessible toilets in accordance with QCVN 10:2014/BXD; 19 out of 100 routes in Ho Chi Minh City provide accessible buses for persons with disabilities with 286 low-floor buses and 8 buses with support equipment for persons with disabilities”.

Moreover, it is obvious that in Vietnam, there are no assessment tools for transport system accessibility. Acknowledging that this constraint affects the development of accessible transport in Vietnam, the project and Transport Development and Strategy Institute (TDSI) have pioneered developing the Universal Design (UD) Criteria for Transport. This set (applicable to road transport) consists of 15 criteria and 57 sub-criteria divided into three criteria groups: for transport infrastructure (five criteria); for vehicles (four criteria); for policies and mechanisms (six criteria). These criteria have been developed based on the expert methods. Accordingly, the accessibility of transport in the localities has been evaluated by scores (on a scale of 1 to 100). Transport systems that have good accessibility receive higher scores, while those that do not have good accessibility and need improvements receive lower scores. Based on scores of each criterion or component at the time of applying the UD Criteria, solutions and proposals will be put forward for transport development plans in order to develop and improve universally accessible transport in localities during the next phase. Currently, the UD Criteria is included in the Decision No. 753/QĐ-TTg, promulgated by the Prime Minister dated June 3rd, 2020 in the implementation of Directive No. 39-CT/TW. Specifically, the Ministry of Transport has been assigned to manage and cooperate with relevant agencies and localities in developing and promulgating the UD Criteria and a technical manual for UD Criteria. This content is also mentioned in Section 6 about



assistance in accessing and using transport in Decision No. 1190/QĐ-TTg issued dated August 5th, 2020 regarding the approval of the Persons with Disabilities Support Program in the period of 2021 - 2030.

After being adopted as a policy, the UD Criteria was piloted in Quang Tri Province and Quang Nam Province. The accessibility scores of the road transport system in Quang Tri Province and Quang Nam Province were 49.6/100 and 54.8/100 respectively. This result has immediately become the premise of proposing solutions in transport development plans annually and for the

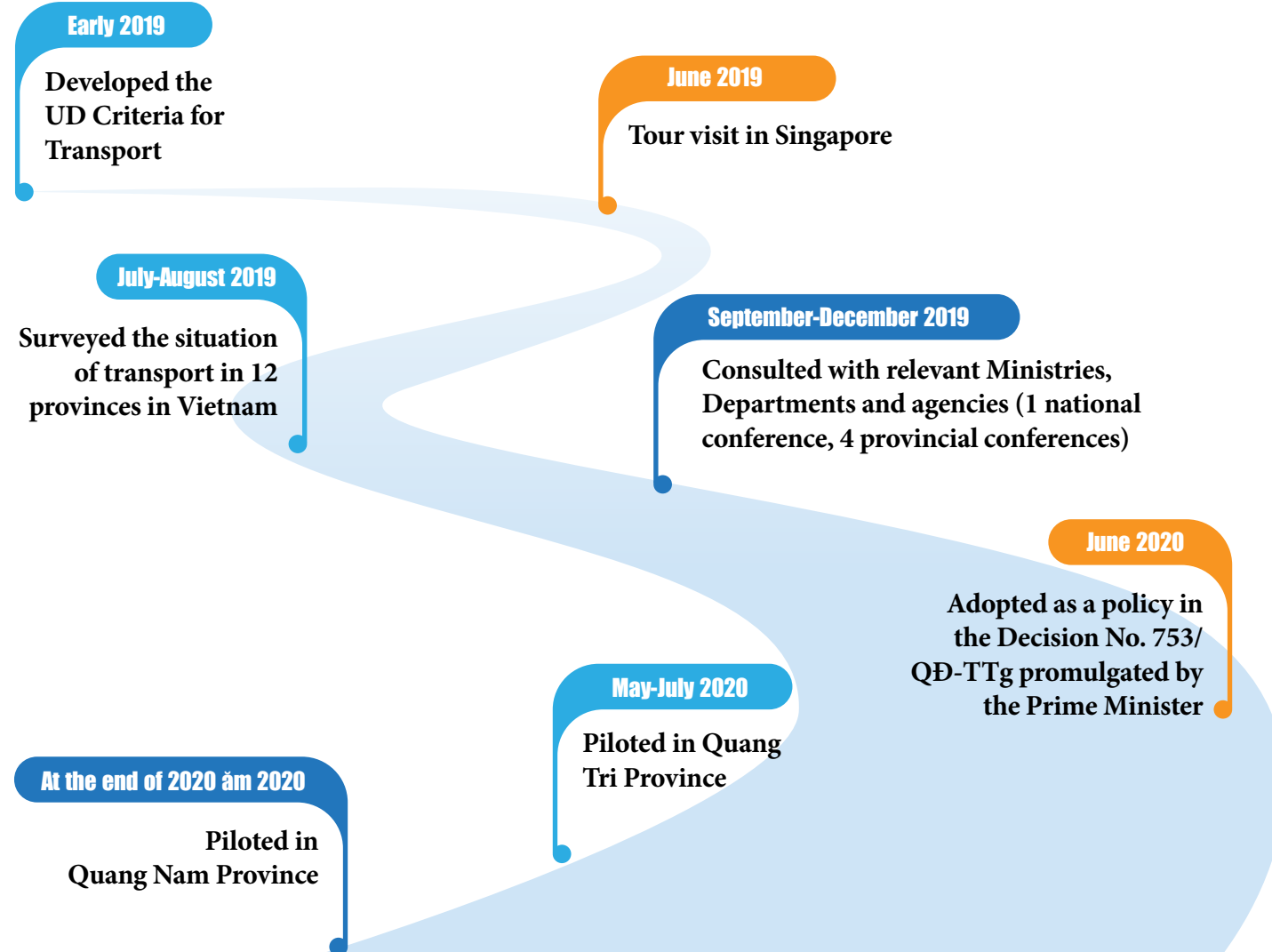
period of 2021 - 2030 in provinces. Demonstrating that UD Criteria is useful and meets local needs, Quang Tri Province and Quang Nam Province are leading in developing accessible transport for persons with disabilities. Specifically, there are three bus shelters in Quang Tri Province: one of them newly built and two others renovated in accordance with UD Criteria for Transport by the Transportation Maintenance Management Board – Quang Tri Provincial Department of Transport in September 2020 and have been used since October 2020. Subsequently to this result, Quang Tri Provincial Department of Transport planned to upgrade

and build the remaining 10 bus shelters to meet universal accessibility standards. Quang Nam Province has made positive moves since the results of applying the UD Criteria were obtained. A lot of recommendations and solutions have been considered for the plans of Quang Nam Province for the period of 2021 - 2030 such as the Plan No. 7704/KH-UBND dated February 29th, 2020 and the Decision on the promulgation of the Plan No. 688/KH-SGTVT dated March 23rd, 2021 in accessible transport in Quang Nam Province. Furthermore, two bus routes, Tam Ky – Chu Lai and Tam Ky – Hoi An,

will also be renovated to ensure accessibility and they will be put into use within the second quarter of 2021. All repairs and construction will be supervised and technically supported by experts from TDSI and ACDC.

Thanks to two organizations' pioneering, with the support of the Ministry of Transport and relevant Departments and agencies, the UD Criteria for Transport will certainly become a solid basis for localities to evaluate their accessibility, improve their transport systems and promote policy implementation in Vietnam.

THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE UNIVERSAL DESIGN CRITERIA FOR TRANSPORT



TRANSITION HOUSE - THE FIRST MODEL IN VIETNAM





“This house is very convenient, all items are located at a low level, which is suitable for wheelchair users, so I could use them easily. In the transition house, I had chances to practice daily tasks such as cooking rice, picking vegetables, washing dishes, transferring from my wheelchair to my bed, etc. Hence, when I got home, I adapted to my routine quite quickly,” said Dang Thi Ngoc Son, a patient and also a persons with a disability, after staying in the Transition house in Phu Vang District Medical Center, Thua Thien – Hue Province.

The Transition House is also known as a rehabilitation model before returning to community, a missing piece which helps connect and promote the efficiency of rehabilitation in hospitals and community-based rehabilitation. Combining physical access and health care, the Transition House simulates a normal house

fully equipped with rooms and items for daily activities. By creating a “home-like” environment for practice, it helps patients and persons with disabilities familiarize themselves, adapt, and live independently before re-integrating into the community. Transition House development is supported by USAID’s “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project.

Regarding the construction of the Transition House, Minh Tam, ACDC’s project coordinator, said: “After coming up with the idea of building such a model, we (ACDC and experts) spent a lot of time studying the documents. However, it was not enough. We continued to directly visit other models in other countries and discuss with hospital directors, doctors and technicians who are experienced in therapeutic activities and independent living in these countries. In Thailand and Singapore, the names of the models are different: “Toward Independent

Living Room”, “Independent Living Room”, “Independent Living House”, etc. In addition to learning from countries with developed medical systems, we consulted the Practice Room for Therapeutic Activities model developed at Hai Duong Medical Technical University. All of these are valuable materials for us to develop the Transition House model.”

The development and use of the Transition House in hospitals has gone through different stages, from developing the model, developing the criteria for selecting medical facilities, conducting field surveys, and discussing with local hospitals, to supervising the construction, renovating and putting into use. All stages were performed based on the full agreement among Project Management Units, Provincial Departments of Health, medical centers and hospitals. In Quang Tri Province, Quang Nam Province and Thua Thien – Hue

Province, four provincial and district health facilities were selected as locations of the model.

The Transition House idea was gradually transformed into reality. Although the construction did not go smoothly all the time, the staff managed to follow the design. Close supervision was required to ensure all requirements were met, and 100% of the local Transition Houses were completed, fulfilling the following criteria: slope, door width, corridor width, kitchen counter height, dining table height, clear space, etc. It was this construction that changed local construction companies’ awareness of accessibility. It was the first time that they carried out projects which ensure full accessibility to persons with disabilities, with characteristic and creative details. A lot of them designed items that were not available on the market, such as alarm lights, cabinet handles and light switches, by themselves after



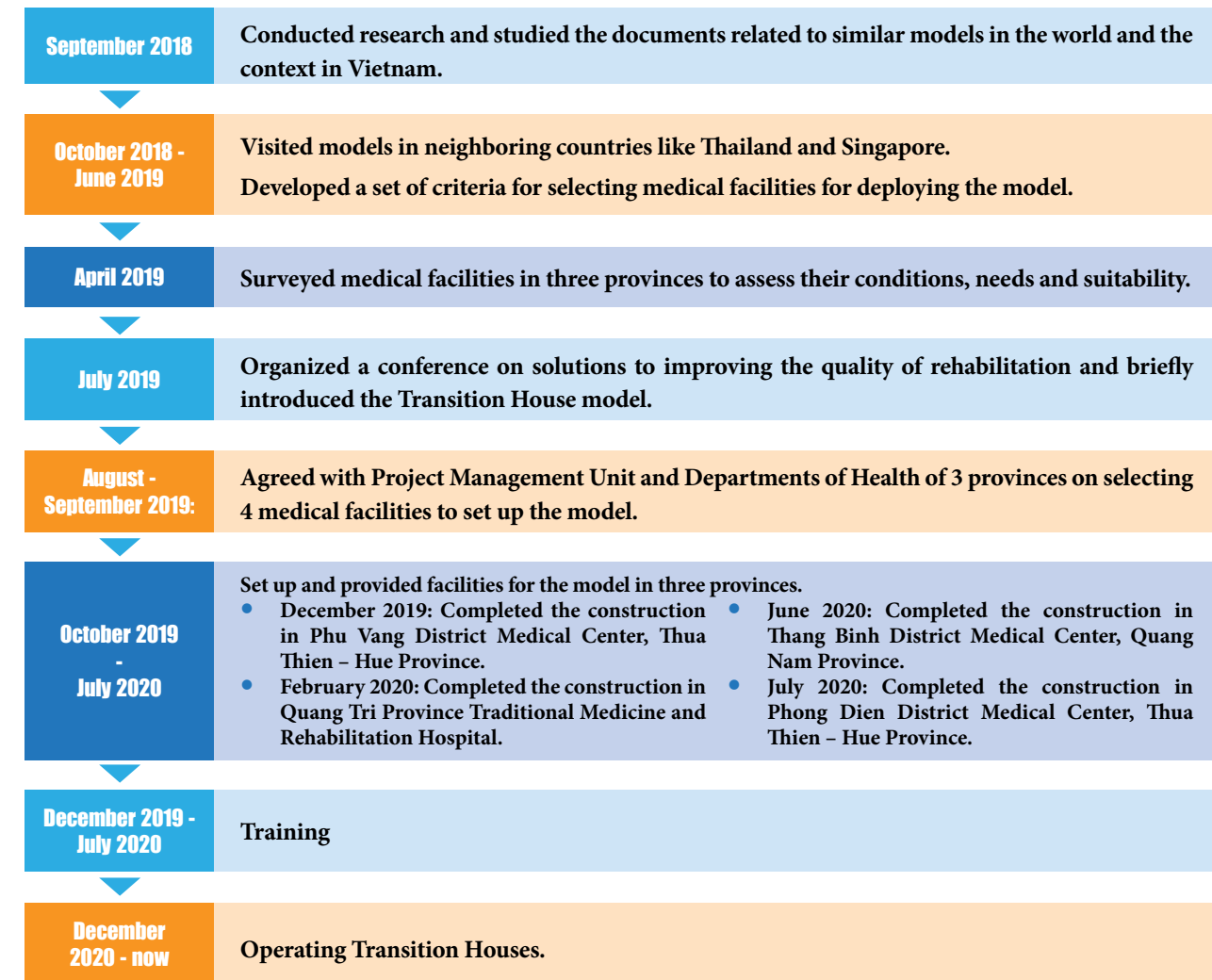
many discussions and trials. Some project management staff said that they would memorize and apply these requirements for accessibility when they run other projects.

With counterparts' efforts, the Transition House model has gradually formed. From December 2019 to July 2020, four Transition Houses in Phu Vang District Medical Center, Phong Dien District (in Thua Thien – Hue Province), Quang Tri Province Traditional Medicine and Rehabilitation Hospital and Thang Binh District Medical Center (in Quang Nam Province) started to operate. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic's great impacts, these Houses have received more than 100 patients and persons with disabilities for inpatient and outpatient treatment after more than a year in operation. The model not only assists the process of integrating into

the community of patients and persons with disabilities, but also helps their families and themselves understand clearly what needs improving in their living environment so that persons with disabilities can optimize their daily activities. Thanks to practical experience in an accessible and appropriate environment, patients and their families have a better understanding of necessary factors that allow them to reduce burdens and be as independent as possible.

With initial positive results, the Transition House model has been recognized by the Ministry of Health and health facilities to be effective for patients and persons with disabilities. Commitments to replicate the model in pilot provinces and requests from other provinces have once again proved this model to be a success in Vietnam.

CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF THE TRANSITION HOUSE MODEL





CHANGES AND DIFFERENCES

THE PIONEERING OFFICER



Regardless of age and positions, positive and progressive thinking as well as willingness to change brings a lot of new things and makes someone become a better person. People with such qualities inspire others with their own experience and spread positive energy. MSc., Dr. Dinh Man – a social worker and a leader dedicated to his profession – is one of them.

MSc., Dr. Dinh Man has collaborated with ACDC through USAID’s “Protecting the Rights of Persons with Disabilities” project from 2015 - 2018 and USAID’s “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project from 2018 - 2021 in Thua Thien – Hue Province. It has been a long journey with many unexpected challenges and changes, but it has turned out impressive to himself and the project.

When the first phase of the “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project started, gaining trust for his expertise and being assigned by leaders of Thua Thien – Hue Provincial Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, he participated in the project but was not a member of Project Management Unit. Initially, he only considered this a task like any other work. However, given opportunities by the project to have close interaction with many persons with disabilities, having practical experience, thinking and participating in the project activities with them, he has undergone many considerable changes in his awareness of persons with disabilities and realized they know how to turn “an ordinary life into an



extraordinary one”. Persons with disabilities have led him from this surprise to another with their capacities. He has become more open, enthusiastic and involved in the project’s activities, especially for its implementation. During the first three years of the project, he experienced and accompanied persons with disabilities, which allowed himself to understand more clearly the difficulties they were faced with and the limitations of social work. He said: *“Previously, while doing social work, I only thought that persons with disabilities simply represented one of the disadvantaged groups that needed support. Then I have gradually realized that they are just like other people on earth, with all human rights and abilities, but restricted by their disabilities.”*

All of these factors have motivated him to become more committed and responsible for local persons with disabilities. In the second phase of the project, he nominated himself to leaders of the Department as a member of Project Management Unit so that he could spend more time learning about persons with disabilities’ needs in such fields as health, education, livelihood, employment, social inclusion and gender equality. He wishes to empower persons with disabilities and create more opportunities for them to be active and confident in their lives.

At this stage of implementing the project, he directly participated in discussions and exchanged ideas to make activities become more practical and have stronger influences on persons with disabilities. He boldly gave advice, made counter-arguments, proposed large-scale



conferences and in particular promoted disability policy research to leaders of the Department. To improve his capacity, he has also actively participated in many advanced training programs of the project. He is specially interested in the a practical training in social work for persons with disabilities for local authorities with relevant sectors that he has not taken before. He was also invited by ACDC to attend the training of trainers on “Prevention of gender-based violence against persons with disabilities” and has become the project’s professional source trainer, directly teaching short training courses for participants with disabilities in the area.

After six years – a journey full of changes, previously as a government officer with old mindset and viewpoints - he has now realized that he is passionate and desires to continue accompanying persons with disabilities. Although he has retired, with his experiences, including practical ones, he is still pursuing the path of teaching and sharing to provide persons with disabilities with better support. He is one of the social workers who has pioneered “proactively” changing his thinking for the inclusion and equality of persons with disabilities.

THE DEVOTED DOCTOR OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



“A good doctor is like an affectionate mother” is the saying that describes Dr. Truong Nhu Son – Director of Phu Vang District Medical Center (Thua Thien – Hue Province) – the best. He not only has great expertise, but also is devoted to patients and dedicated to the development of the medical model to support persons with disabilities.

Specialist Doctor Level II Truong Nhu Son is known for his devotion to patients. After many years of work and dedication with a lot of achievements, Dr. Son was appointed as member of District Party Committee, Secretary of Party Committee, Director of Phu Vang District Medical Center in Thua Thien – Hue Province in 2006. As a doctor and a leader, he has made quick and wise decisions and also promoted the best support

for patients, especially persons with disabilities in the locality.

“During nearly 30 years working in the health system and holding different positions, I have witnessed a lot of pathetic cases. Feeling sympathy for patients, I’m more determined to make them feel secure and have faith in doctors.” – Here is what Dr. Son said and also his thought throughout his time working as a doctor. This acts as a guideline for him to undertake various activities, directing the team of doctors and medical staff in Phu Vang District Medical Center to treat patients, including persons with disabilities.

The construction of the Transition House in the medical center is a testament to Dr. Son’s previous commitments.

Since he knew about the model, he has supported the idea and wanted to apply the model in the medical center so that patients and persons with disabilities would be supported more. During the survey of the project, together with the team of doctors, technicians and medical staff, Dr. Son expressed his expectation that the model would be deployed and ensured the medical center would try to meet all requirements for building the Transition House. On December 4th, 2019, “Phu Vang Transition House” was inaugurated and has become one of the most outstanding achievements of Thua Thien – Hue Province in general and Phu Vang District Medical Center in particular. This is the first Transition House in Central Vietnam that meets the design standards in National Technical Regulations issued by Ministry of Construction. Throughout the process of construction and operations, Dr. Son has always kept track of the project to understand all of the information clearly in order to allocate the right people to the right positions. He regularly discussed with the project staff to learn from and exchange the experiences, then shared with doctors in Department of Rehabilitation so that they could understand the model well.

Since the Transition House started to operate, Dr. Son has visited every day to check, share with and help patients make use of the model’s design for their own rehabilitation. Thanks to the encouragement of Dr. Son and the medical center’s technicians, many patients have received treatment and made good progress. Some patients even donated equipment to the Transition House

as a way to thank the doctors here and expressed their wish for other patients to benefit from the Transition House. Not only is Dr. Son devoted to persons with disabilities and patients in Phu Vang District Medical Center, he also hopes that the Transition House model will continue to be replicated in other hospitals.

“The Transition House is a practical and useful model which has assisted persons with disabilities a lot. It is necessary to replicate the model in all medical centers in Thua Thien – Hue Province, then in the whole society for persons with disabilities to access.”

Apart from his enthusiasm for the Transition House model, every time there are supporting activities for persons with disabilities, Dr. Son is always willing to participate in with the medical staff. Take the free health check-up event for nearly 50 women with disabilities in Phu Vang District as an example. Simultaneously, he frequently provides information and assigns doctors and medical staff to take part in the project’s training activities to increase their awareness and capacity regarding persons with disabilities’ issues. He always reminds the doctors and medical staff: *“Perhaps for us, patients’ smiles and happiness are the most precious gifts.”*

Dr. Truong Nhu Son’s enthusiasm, vision and devotion has made a lot of doctors and local officers change their awareness greatly, acquire new knowledge and experience to assist persons with disabilities.



THE STORY OF THE WOMAN WITH “LITTLE BODY, GREAT MIND”



“Look towards the sunshine, the darkness will fall behind”. The woman with “little body, great mind”, Le Thi Sau, could do it. She has overcome her personal adversities to seize the opportunities, step out of “the darkness” and find her own “sunshine”.

Le Thi Sau was born in a big family, with seven children and living in extremely difficult circumstances in Thua Thien – Hue Province. Due to the impacts of toxic chemicals, by the age of 8, Sau’s disability had become more evident. She turned out to be a hunchback, with slow physical development and unstable health. Her father passed away when she was little, and her mother is old. Her family’s main source of income is growing rice and crops. As a person with a disability, she was

often discriminated by others. She always thought that she was the burden of her family and the society, which led to her depression, low self-esteem and reluctance to communicate with other people. Although she was eager to study, she dropped out of College of Information Technology when she was a sophomore due to her family’s difficult circumstances.

After many incidents, Sau became less communicative. *“No words could describe me at that time. I was always sure that the society discriminated against me because of my disability. I myself have a low self-esteem and want to deny it.”*

Then everything gradually changed for her.

In 2016, Sau met Lan Anh, Director of ACDC, in a training session in Thua Thien – Hue Province. Seeing Lan Anh, a happy and confident woman in a wheelchair, also a leader of a reputable organization, Sau was inspired to change her self-awareness and actions to assert herself. She has realized that persons with disabilities also have the same rights and obligations as people without disabilities. And she feels lucky to know more about District's Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD) where she met people having similar circumstances. Having been a shy and depressed person for many years, Sau has actively participated in many training activities and conferences, speaking up, gradually asserting herself and stepping out of her "shell" of self-deprecation.

Since 2017, Sau has become a member of Executive Committee as well as permanent secretary of OPD in Quang Dien District, where she lives. Overcoming her inferiority complex, she has taken part in a lot of competitions and gained different achievements. In particular, she won a consolation prize with her "Doing business and creating jobs for women with disabilities" start-up project in the "Women's Start-ups II – 2020" competition organized by Thua Thien – Hue Province Women's Union. Besides, with her knowledge acquired from her participation in the OPD's activities and projects, she is always willing to share with people in similar circumstances in the hope of helping them build their self-esteem and seek opportunities for themselves.

The more she learns, the more she opens her heart and the more positive she becomes, the more she desires



to establish a Women with Disabilities' Club in the district to create a "home" for women with disabilities to do activities together, share with each other and help each other develop. Ultimately, the women with "little body, great mind" made it. With support from USAID's "Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities" project, on September 25th, 2020, Quang Dien District Women with Disabilities's Club was officially founded, and Le Thi Sau is its first chairwoman. She said: *"When seeing people in similar circumstances, I feel as if I have seen myself in the past thinking that I was discriminated by the society because of my disability and torturing myself. Therefore, I want to help them overcome and assert themselves. Our Club was officially launched on September 25th, 2020 with 25 members. I hope more women with disabilities will join us in the upcoming period. I hope this will become a place for them to meet, talk to and share with each other, join self-employment activities together and increase income through small business and production activities."*

Currently, after many years of being self-contained, Sau has found joy, happiness and hope again. She has confidently worked as a tutor for kids in her neighborhood to earn money, support her family and bring joy to herself.

Sau's story of stepping out of "the darkness" will always inspire women with disabilities to have stronger motivation to break barriers and seek development activities for themselves.

OVERCOMING THE LIMITS



“We are persons with disabilities coming from different districts in Quang Tri Province, with different circumstances. Some of us are confident; some feel inferior with their disabilities; some are farmers; some do business. However, we have met each other and overcome our limits together to “witness” our own changes.”

Persons with disabilities in Quang Tri Province have not had many chances to acquire knowledge about gender and issues related to gender-based violence (GBV) against persons with disabilities. The opportunities for persons with disabilities to share and apply their knowledge and skills have also been limited. The idea of developing a group of core trainers on GBV in Quang Tri Province was derived from the needs of persons with disabilities and has been implemented promptly.

Training of trainers on GBV were run quickly and methodically by USAID’s “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project. Trainers have enthusiastically shared knowledge about gender and GBV. Participants were trained for skills in giving instructions and managing classes, as well as given opportunities to learn and practice sharing their gained knowledge with persons with disabilities in their localities. They self-developed through lessons, practice sessions and trips to become trainers. Based on the lessons that the project provided, to prepare for each training course, they discussed, agreed on a plan, assigned tasks and selected

suitable content and methods for implementation. Therefore, the training courses were highly effective and achieved the project’s objectives. Having been the beginners in the first place, some of the participants have become excellent trainers. Nguyen Thi Nam, a woman with mobility impairment in Vinh Linh District, also the eldest and team leader, said: *To know whether training courses are effective or not, it is necessary to have pre- and post-assessments. We have thought and discussed to prepare the simplest and most understandable questionnaire for local persons with disabilities. At the end of each training course, we have a meeting to discuss what is good and what needs improvements of each member. This helps participants develop and enhance their teaching skills. Several members have become more confident and actively asked to provide training in some content.*

Ho Van Bon, a person with disability in Dakrong District, shared: *“We cherish each other. Since I joined the group, I have received a lot of help from others in terms of methods, skills, knowledge and experience. They have given me more motivation to be more confident in sharing gained knowledge with persons with disabilities and taking part in other activities in the locality, which I have never done before.”*

So far, the group of trainers with disabilities have cooperated with the project in running eight training courses for more than 300 persons with disabilities on GBV. Many persons with disabilities have made positive



changes after the training, knowing how to protect themselves and people in similar circumstances. Tran Thi H., living in a town in Quang Tri Province, said: *“This is the first time I have participated in a training course for persons with disabilities. Initially, I thought it would be just for fun, but I gained a lot of useful knowledge and skills. Now I know how to protect myself and persons with disabilities around me.”*

In particular, the group of trainers has also been highly appreciated by Quang Tri Provincial Association of Persons with Disabilities and Agent Orange Victims, Sponsorship for Persons with Disabilities and Child Rights Protection and district OPDs. Phung Xuan Quy – Vice Chairman of Quang Tri Provincial OPD commented: *“The project has succeeded in developing a group of source trainers who are persons with disabilities*

with adequate knowledge and skills to give instructions and train other persons with disabilities. Particularly, they have inspired participants to develop themselves and make more contributions.”

With their efforts, the group has achieved initial success. Now, a new stage has opened up for them. The members have been invited to be key facilitators in RENEW Project’s sessions on disability-related legislation and policies; Humanity and Inclusion (HI)’s peer counseling sessions and sessions on gender in taking care of persons with disabilities. And they will continue to overcome their new limits together!



SEEDING CHANGES



This is a story about the leader of movement for persons with disabilities in Quang Tri Province named Thai Vinh Lieu. He has a responsible working style, openly acknowledges mistakes, dares to think and take actions for the sake of persons with disabilities.

“What I have learned from the project and would like to share with everyone everywhere and at any time is that accessibility is necessary for persons with disabilities to integrate, from at home to in the society.” – What Thai Vinh Lieu said demonstrates his great changes. He is Chairman of Quang Tri Provincial Association of Persons with Disabilities and Agent Orange Victims, Sponsorship for Persons with Disabilities and Child Rights Protection, former Deputy Secretary of Provincial Party Committee.

When listening to what he said, we felt both happy and proud because after having participated in the project for a long time, with everyone’s enthusiasm and efforts, the key leader of movement for persons with disabilities in Quang Tri Province have made profound and positive changes in both awareness and actions, which brings great benefits to persons with disabilities in the province. Thinking back to the first day when we approached him to outline the project, the first questions he asked us were how much the project’s budget was and what it could do for persons with disabilities. At that time, we wondered when everyone would correctly understand “disability inclusion”.

As Head of Project Management Unit of the “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project implemented in Quang Tri Province by ACDC with support from USAID, Lieu has always been enthusiastic about doing everything for persons with disabilities. By fully taking part in each activity of the project, from capacity building courses to conferences, dialogues, direct legal counseling and policy implementation monitoring, accessibility monitoring etc., his awareness of inclusion of persons with disabilities has changed considerably. He has realized that persons with disabilities should be supported not only with foods and transport, but also based on their needs and rights. Accordingly, he has directed the Association’s fundraising activities, which not only focus on giving scholarships, wheelchairs and gifts on holidays, but also involve promoting the Association’s image to raise funds and support persons with disabilities in living independently, having easier access to the community, building accessible toilets, ramps, etc.

At the workshop in sharing the implementation of persons with disabilities-related policies in 2019, Lieu frankly stated: *“With the project’s support, our Association has collaborated with Department of Construction, Department of Transport and Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs in inspecting public works in several provinces and found that accessible constructions are rare. Health facilities only have accessible paths, but do not have accessible toilets for persons with disabilities. Looking back on when I was a provincial leader, I think I was too bureaucratic and had no idea of this issue due to not checking the accessibility of public works to persons*

with disabilities and just looking at specialized agencies' reports."

Not just making such statements, he has turned his thoughts into actions. He requested Quang Tri Provincial Association of Persons with Disabilities and Agent Orange Victims, Sponsorship for Persons with Disabilities and Child Rights Protection to report to Provincial People's Committee that public works had not met the criteria for accessibility according to the standards in Plan No. 3861/KH-UBND on assisting persons with disabilities in the period of 2012-2020. Responding to the efforts of the Association and Thai Vinh Lieu, Provincial People's Committee officially issued a dispatch to Department of Construction on September 16th, 2019. Immediately after that, Department of Construction issued the dispatch No. 1456/SXD-QLXD requesting design consultancies and investors to comply with QCVN 10:2014/BXD. Up to now, there have been some new constructions in the province, such as accessible ramps at Vietcombank Branch on Hung Vuong Street, Dong Ha City; accessible facilities for wheelchair users at Ward 2 People's Committee Headquarter. The number of works have been renovated, namely accessible ramps at the office of Department of Finance and Le Duan Park.

Changes in the mindset will lead to changes in actions and amazing results. These are testaments to many people's efforts to join hands and contribute to the accessibility to and equal inclusion of persons with disabilities in the society. Thai Vinh Lieu is just one of many individuals who are making contributions to inclusion of persons with disabilities every day.



GRASPING OPPORTUNITIES AND ASSERTING THE SELF



Grasping opportunities and asserting ourselves will bring unexpected results. This is a story about a girl with disability in the windy region with white sand – Quang Tri Province¹. As long as you do not give up, when one door closes, another door will open and opportunities will come.

After I signed the first labor contract ever in my life, my emotions spilled over. Having held the bachelor's degree for seven years, I have finally gained recognition. The dream of doing a job related to my expertise is no longer distant for a girl with disability like me.

I lost part of my left leg because I had an arterial occlusive disease when I was 1 year old. I grew up while dreaming

of working to help people like me, so I learned about social work. However, turning that dream into reality was much more difficult than I expected. After receiving the bachelor's degree, I started applying for jobs, from civil service exams to Center of persons with disabilities, but I was rejected because of my poor health, or in other words, my disability.

I felt broken when each of my applications was turned down. To make ends meet, I had to put aside my dream temporarily and become an unskilled worker. My Bachelor's degree was covered with dust in the corner of my cabinet. There was a time when I was really discouraged, but I still had a desire to help persons with disabilities. Then one day in February 2019, I

¹ The story of Le Thi Tho, a person with physical disability in Quang Tri Province

read the news about the “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project implemented by ACDC with support from USAID on the Facebook page of Quang Tri Provincial OPD which was shared by one of my friends. After that, I connected with the project staff and OPD for advice on property. Coincidentally, shortly after, Hoang Duc Dung from Vinh Linh District OPD recommended me to attend the Training of trainers (ToT) on prevention of gender-based violence. From then on, a new door has opened for me.

The training course on prevention of gender-based violence against persons with disabilities helped me get to know more people in similar circumstances who are working with persons with disabilities, obtain more knowledge and skills which I just learned briefly previously. After many occasions of participating in the project, I was offered the position of being a trainer to share my gained knowledge with local persons with disabilities, which is something I have never thought of before. I still remember the nervousness of being a trainer in a training session for the first time, but the look of participants who have similar circumstances made me feel calm and complete my task well.

In the hope of regaining my confidence and enthusiasm to take more meaningful actions for persons with disabilities, I decided to apply for an internship at ACDC’s project office in Quang Tri Province because I have a belief that this opportunity



will help me overcome my limits, which is also what ACDC’s project has promoted. This time, my decision was right. During my short internship at ACDC, I gained more knowledge and skills in working with persons with disabilities and had chances to witness how they lived with my own eyes, share with them, motivate them while providing information about persons with disabilities-related legislation and policies for everyone. This is what I have always desired.

I realize that I have become full-grown and this was proved by my full-time contract with ACDC in 2021. The “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project has opened a door for me and given me an opportunity to fulfil my dream. Now, my journey has really begun.



THE AUTONOMY AND PARTICIPATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IS ENHANCED THANKS TO THE GUIDANCE ON INDEPENDENT LIVING



“He was so (disabled), how could he do anything? I did everything for him to help save time. I just hope that after I die, his brothers and neighbors will give him some rice or porridge to eat day after day.” This is what Nguyen Thi Nho, 87 years old, whose son is Chuc, a person with severe disability in Dai Loc District, Quang Nam Province, said.

Nho has always been worried about how her disabled son will live and who will take care of him one day after she dies. Her son, Phan Van Chuc, 50 years old, has a physical disability, with paraplegia and atrophy of the right hand. He has to use a wheelchair to move around, and all of his daily activities depend on his left arm. Due to this inconvenience, his mother always does everything for him, partly because she cherishes him, and partly because she thinks that he could not do anything with his disability.

Through USAID’s “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project, the project team provides instruction and support to help persons with disabilities become more independent. When the consulting team asked Nho to let Chuc try to do some things by himself, such as cooking, washing vegetables, washing dishes, etc., she brushed us off with a sad look: “Look, he can’t even eat. How can he do anything?” Understanding her worries and doubts, the consulting team convinced her with real-life evidence. Members with disabilities like Chuc in the team directly did activities that he could try such as washing dishes, cooking, etc. Then, he started to do the same while his mother was watching. To her

astonishment, he completed those activities although they were a bit awkward and time-consuming for the first time. The team also suggested to the family how to arrange and renovate their furnishings to facilitate the movement and activities of wheelchair users like him. In particular, the rehabilitation technicians also guided him through simple rehabilitation exercises so that he could practice daily at home. Chuc shared: “I am jubilant with this support. If anyone gave me money, all would just be spent on food. Today, with your guidance, I feel very grateful. I will practice and follow your instructions so that later on, I can help my mum with simple tasks that she did by herself before.”

One month later, when the project staff returned to Chuc’s house to evaluate the progress made since their intervention and provide necessary support, they realized a lot of positive changes. The first one was the rearrangement of tables, chairs and other furnishings. His mother happily shared that this change made the house tidier and made it easier for him to use his wheelchair to move around and work. Beforehand, most of the time, he only lay in bed. However, now he can use his wheelchair more often, do his personal activities and help his mother with household chores.

Additionally, every morning he practices his rehabilitation exercises, which has helped him improve his health.

He now performs many daily activities well, such as personal hygiene, washing clothes, tidying his house,

going to the market, cooking, washing dishes, etc. He said that at first, it had been difficult and time-consuming, but it was much easier now. Nho added: *“I got sick for a few days. Fortunately, he went to the market, cooked by himself and took care of me. Beforehand, we hadn’t known what to do.”*

ACDC worked with another person with a disability, Manh, a 39-year-old man who was left paraplegic after a serious traffic accident. Since then, he has just used a wheelchair to move around, and has been entirely dependent on his parents. His parents always thought that their son was disadvantaged, so they did every household chore, from washing clothes, cooking, to tidying the house, etc. For nearly eight years, he has done almost nothing but personal hygiene and going to cafés every day to kill time. He has had no specific plans for his future.

The consulting team advised Manh and his family on daily therapeutic exercises to increase his arm strength, on using assistive devices such as parallel bars to practice walking, how to renovate and extend the bedroom’s doors, and installing shower seats and grab bars in the toilet for his convenience and safety. At the same time, the team encouraged his family to give him opportunities to do daily tasks by himself, which would enhance his independence, his health and daily functioning. The team also suggested that they should discuss with each other later to find a suitable job for him.

When the project staff returned to Manh’s house three



months later, he excitedly shared that instead of just sitting at cafés smoking and playing chess like before, he had started a new job collecting and selling scrap. Moreover, during this time, he persistently practiced all the rehabilitation exercises he learned from the rehabilitation technicians to improve his health and his ability to take care of himself and daily functioning. He thanked the project for having motivated him to change and be more optimistic.

Chuc and Manh are just two of the many persons with disabilities in Quang Nam Province who have benefited from activities aimed at enhancing independent living skills for persons

with disabilities under the “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project, implemented by ACDC and supported by USAID. By raising awareness of persons with disabilities and their families regarding the importance of independent living and independent living skills (through peer counseling between persons with disabilities), making suggestions on arranging and renovating furnishings for more accessibility to persons with disabilities, guiding through rehabilitation exercises at home, etc., the autonomy and participation of persons with disabilities in their daily lives and social activities have been significantly enhanced.



PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES SPEAK OUT AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



Gender-based violence is a common phenomenon in our society which persons with disabilities, in general, and women and girls with disabilities in particular, are most prone to.

Gender-based violence is accepted as “normal”

“I always think that persons with disabilities suffer from gender-based violence because they have disabilities. Moreover, this is a private family matter, so if other people know about it, they will laugh at it, and the women might even be beaten more by their husbands for being big mouths”. This is what V.T.T.T., Duy Thu Commune’s OPD, Duy Xuyen District, Quang Nam Province, said.

Many other persons with disabilities have the same thoughts with T. regarding gender-based violence. They did not dare to speak up and seek help for fear of embarrassment and objections, for fear that problems will become more serious instead of being solved. Many persons with disabilities are even unaware that they are victims of gender-based violence. Particularly, the community is also unaware of the seriousness of gender-based violence.

“She was abused by an acquaintance, which caused her disability. She told me not to tell anyone. She said it was over, as if her fate was like that and she must bear with it,” said X., whose daughter used to experience violence and become disabled.

K., a person with a disability in Dai Loc District, said that she suffered from sexual violence, which made her have an unwanted child, but she remained silent and did not dare to speak up because she thought no one would believe her. Moreover, her family believes that it is be a blessing in disguise because she can rely on her child in the future.

It is known that in Duy Xuyen District, there are many women with disabilities whose husbands have often gone out for alcohol, then got home swearing at them and beating them. These husbands assume that their wives have failed to fulfil their duties as wives due to their disabilities, which is a burden to them. At such times, the wives often ran to the house of T. to take shelter, then returned home and continued to suffer violence.

The fact is that many other women with disabilities have experienced gender-based violence in different forms and at different levels. Nevertheless, they have endured it in silence and waited until the injury has gone away without speaking up. They themselves have no knowledge of gender-based violence for prevention or where to go for help.



The journey to change the awareness

Since May 2019, ACDC's "Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities" project supported by USAID, has conducted many communication and training activities to raise persons with disabilities' awareness of prevention of and response to gender-based violence in Quang Nam Province. These activities have taken place in six districts, towns and cities for 230 persons with disabilities.

Having directly participated in the training course, T. and other women with disabilities in Duy Thu Commune, Duy Xuyen District, have understood that gender-based violence is a violation of the law and persons with disabilities' rights. persons with disabilities themselves are not at fault. The perpetrators are at fault and must bear full responsibilities. They have also been provided with knowledge and skills to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, along with places that persons

with disabilities can go to when experiencing gender-based violence.

After the training, a woman with disability shared: *"It turns out that I used to suffer from gender-based violence, but I didn't know. I thought they were just joking."*

In Nui Thanh District, the training course in preventing GBV against persons with disabilities also attracted many persons with disabilities for participation. Some of them had to row the boats and then walk nearly two kilometers to attend the course. They said that the knowledge they learned was very new and meaningful to them, and they would apply it for themselves and share with other women with disabilities who did not have the opportunity to participate in the training course.

"We will not keep silent!"

After participating in communication and training activities to raise awareness of gender-based violence, persons with disabilities have understood their rights while having more motivation and confidence to respond to gender-based violence.

T., Duy Thu Commune's OPD, Duy Xuyen District, Quang Nam Province, said that she would actively discuss with Women's Union, the local police, Provincial Organization of Persons with Disabilities, etc. for reporting when any members of Duy Thu Commune's OPD experienced gender-based violence to seek help and protect their rights instead of remaining silent like before.

Recently, the project has received a call from a female member of OPD. She said: *"Yesterday, a member with a disability was beaten by her husband and ran to my house to take shelter. I advised herself and her family to*

report to Women's Union because this had happened a few times. Women's Union and the local authorities visited her house to give advice and reconcile them. Her husband then pledged not to use violence against her. Although there are still such cases in my commune, other women with disabilities and I will no longer endure in silence. We will ask for neighbors' intervention or call the authorities to come and resolve so that we will have a more equal life and will not suffer from such violence."

Preventing gender-based violence against persons with disabilities, in general, and persons with disabilities in Quang Nam Province, in particular, is a long journey with many barriers. However, with the contributions of the project, the community's joining hands and more importantly, the voice of women with disabilities, it is believed that in the future, gender-based violence against persons with disabilities, especially women and girls with disabilities, will gradually come to an end.

IF IT DOES NOT END, START IT AGAIN

“If one day your life is covered with black,
take a pen and draw sparkling stars on it.
(Anonymous)”



“Becoming confident, living with objectives, thinking and taking actions independently” have been my remarkable changes after taking part in a project run by ACDC since 2018.

I am Nguyen Thi Thuan², currently living in Duy Xuyen District, Quang Nam Province. I have had physical disability since an incident which I will never forget in my life. The accident in 2006 made me, a girl at her most ideal age, lie in one place, with my whole body cramped, and become inarticulate. I was discharged and returned home with the conclusion that I might have to live in a vegetative state for the rest of my life.

It was a big shock for my mother and loved ones. Being hurt, my family still had hopes and asked the hospital staff to keep me there. Then, I was transferred to Da Nang Orthopedic and Rehabilitation Hospital, going through a lot of practice with difficulties and efforts. I managed to say “m...u...m...” after being soaked in sweat and shedding a lot of tears. Gradually, I could hold the parallel bar to walk and say “mum” more clearly. Miracles happened to me and my family.

As my health improved slightly, I had acupuncture as an intervention. That was when I found myself small, weak and powerless. I felt helpless when seeing my mother’s tears every day and embarrassed by other people’s strange look. And most importantly, I love my mother. She was thin, but did dozens of jobs, like selling vegetables, to earn extra income while taking care of me was already

² The person’s name is changed.

too hard. From the bottom of my heart, I wished to no longer rely on her.

That is why after being discharged from the hospital, I practiced by myself in the same way the doctors instructed me. Besides, fortunately, I had instructors from the “Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities” project implemented by ACDC and funded by USAID to install the handrails in different positions in my house so that I could walk and move around actively every day. As time passed by, there were small progresses in my life. However, I could not help but feel discouraged and want to give up.

Then I had a new joy. I was invited more frequently to activities. And I have noticed myself change.

In May 2019, for the first time, I was invited by Duy Xuyen District’s OPD to participate in the training session in reproductive health care for women with disabilities. I learned about reproductive health and have applied the knowledge to taking care of myself more properly. I met and shared with other women in similar circumstances. For the first time after the accident, I thought of having a baby. After that, I attended the training in prevention of gender-based violence against persons with disabilities. Like many other women, I gained knowledge about gender-based violence and have actively avoided it by not interacting with people who make me feel unsafe and strangers, moving around carefully and paying attention to the surroundings to ensure my safety.



In June 2020, I was given instructions on independent living skills. The technicians directly showed me how to move around and walk, along with many other rehabilitation exercises. I kept practicing and felt significant changes: My body no longer hurt, and I had avoided a midlife crisis. Most importantly, I believed I could live, think and decide independently. Thinking about when my mother gets old and frail, I have become more determined to change myself. Currently, I have helped my mother with many tasks, including household chores that I never thought I could do before. Previously, she took care of every meal for me, but now I can go to the market, do housework, prepare meals and wait for her to arrive home.

I no longer feel depressed, helpless and a burden to my family. I am confident, positive and independent in thinking and taking action. I also actively earn extra income by running an online shop and selling motorbike insurance to insurance agents.

My mother feels happy because I have overcome myself and all of my efforts have paid off. Deep down, I have realized that there are still many beautiful things in life and my dreams can be fulfilled as long as I make an effort and have support.





THE CONNECTED ARMS

SUPPORT NETWORK FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Establishing a network of collaborators to collect information and needs for legal legal is the achievement of promoting the implementation of policies for persons with disabilities. The network has been formed and operated effectively in localities, especially in Thua Thien – Hue Province.

Promoting the implementation of policies for persons with disabilities is aimed at helping persons with disabilities integrate equally into all aspects of their lives. Therefore, services and support models have been developed. Particularly, free legal counseling services and models for persons with disabilities have been prioritized and systematically developed in Thua Thien - Hue Province.

In the period of 2015 - 2018, with support from USAID, ACDC conducted this project in Thua Thien - Hue Province for the first time. It encountered a lot of objective and subjective obstacles, especially in 2015 - 2016. Considering such limitations, many capacity-building and legal and policy training courses were organized regularly, helping persons with disabilities and their families become fully aware of their rights and interests. In the first phase, more than 2,480 persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities' families in nine districts and towns received free legal advice in different forms. However, there were not many collaborators to collect information and data related to legal counseling during this period.

In the second phase, 2018 - 2021, the network of collaborators has improved. Through propagating and

mobilizing, especially with the initial achievements of the program for the sake of persons with disabilities, the group of collaborators collecting legal advice forms in Thua Thien – Hue Province has expanded greatly to share with and support local persons with disabilities better. Most of the collaborators are reputable leaders in the community of persons with disabilities, so their work ensures high efficiency. There are many cases in which persons with disabilities, with the help of collaborators, went through the right counseling process and received appropriate social protection payments in accordance with regulations. Some successfully applied for preferential loans for persons with disabilities.

As a person with physical disability, Ho Trong Khoa – member of Huong Thuy Town's OPD – used to run into many difficulties when learning about the preferential loan program of Bank for Social Policies to fund his family's business. Fortunately, he was guided by the collaborators who are leaders of Huong Thuy Town's OPD. His questions were immediately transferred to ACDC's Legal Department for free legal advice, then he was given instructions on procedures by counselors. He proactively contacted Bank for Social Policies to borrow money and a loan of 50 million dong with a very preferential interest rate was approved for him. Thanks to that, he opened a small store and stabilized his family life. Realizing the significance of the program, he joined and became one of the key collaborators in Huong Thuy Town, desiring to help other persons with disabilities.



The more persons with disabilities have received adequate legal counseling, the more excited the group of collaborators becomes. They have overcome their disabilities, devoted time, efforts and enthusiasm to visiting each person with a significant/a very significant disability, listening to his/her feelings and needs, assisting him/her in asking questions and collecting the forms to

send to ACDC's counselors. Hence, the program has attracted more and more active collaborators. Nguyen Tu – member of Executive Committee of of Phu Vang District's OPD – is one of them. He lost one of his legs after the war. Despite having to stick with a wooden crutch, he is very enthusiastic about helping local persons with disabilities. In addition to household chores, he spends

time visiting each persons with a disability's house to help them write down on legal counseling forms. He said: *"A lot of local people want to receive counseling, but there are still many limitations. I am much obliged that there is such a meaningful program which enables me to support more persons with disabilities. It is my pleasure and my responsibility for persons with disabilities."*

The network of collaborators collecting information and legal counseling needs acts as a bridge between persons with disabilities and the government's legal policies.



THE HAPPINESS OF A GRASSROOTS OFFICER



Many persons with disabilities have benefited from the right policies. That is the contribution of the group of collaborators who collect information and legal counseling needs in localities. The grassroots officer Hoang Su, a member of Executive Committee of Trieu Phong District Association of Persons with Disabilities and Agent Orange Victims, Sponsorship for Persons with Disabilities and Child Rights Protection, Quang Tri Province, is one of them.

I have been involved in work related to persons with disabilities since 2007, as Chairman of Trieu Ai Commune Persons with Disabilities' Club, Trieu Phong District. My main task is to host meetings, visit sick members, communicate with Clubs in other communes or participate in the activities of projects supporting persons with disabilities in increasing income like cow

breeding. In 2014, I was elected to Executive Committee of Trieu Phong District's OPD. Then, my workload increased, ranging from managing the list of members, supporting sick members, to receiving support from external organizations, distributing gifts and wheelchairs to members on holidays. Most of the tasks were related to charity.

Since the beginning of 2019, I have become the district collaborator to collect persons with disabilities' information, questions and needs for counseling on issues related to legislation and policies for persons with disabilities in the "Raising Voices, Creating Opportunities" project, implemented by ACDC with support from USAID. My task is to collect information and pass it on to the staff in charge of the project. After that, the forms are transferred to ACDC's Legal Department. The counselors will directly call persons



with disabilities who are in need, answer their questions and give advice. This is a completely new task for me, which also makes my current job more interesting. Initially, I did not fully understand the information that I had to collect based on the forms, so it was inevitable to go back and forth a few times. Besides, some persons with disabilities did not understand, thought I came to give them something and got disappointed when finding out I did not. Honestly, I was discouraged and considered refusing this role. However, when I thought it over, this role would bring a lot of benefits to persons

with disabilities, so I have kept on.

Gradually, more persons with disabilities have known about me. They trust me more and happily share their joy with me when their questions and problems have received proper counseling and been promptly resolved. I still remember that sometimes, it was around 10p.m when some persons with disabilities called and told me that their allowances were increased, or they could get loans for doing business. For someone, a monthly allowance of a few hundred dong is too little, but in

my place, it is a large sum of money for many people. I am happy for them. My greatest achievement is that within the first six months of 2020, District People's Committee decided to change the social protection regime for nearly 20 persons with disabilities. I find myself working with many collaborators in the local network to promote the best implementation of policies for persons with disabilities. The joy has gradually become greater, and my work has become more meaningful.

Apart from being a collaborator to collect information and legal counseling needs, I am lucky to have participated in the project's activities such as training, conferences, monitoring sessions on accessible constructions, etc. These have allowed me to gain more experience and knowledge in the Association's tasks and support other members better.

Although the project no longer has many supporting activities in the locality, it is what I have learned, experienced and participated in as a collaborator that makes me more mature and happier in my job.





NO PRECEDENT

A GIFT - A SMILE



Whenever a gift is given, there is a smile in return. The relief program was really a challenging journey, but each team member gained valuable experience. Their willingness, enthusiasm and above all, urge to do something when our Ancient Capital flooded, was the driving force for the whole team.

No one could forget the image of the floods in Central Vietnam during the storm surges in 2020. The heartbreaking figures were updated every hour, making people who were living far away from their hometown here and people across the country nervous and worried. Thanks to ACDC's project office in the province, information about the storm surges and difficulties of persons with disabilities who were "hung by a hair" were regularly updated.

There are 9 districts/towns/city in Thua Thien – Hue Province, 4 of which were severely affected: Phong Dien District, Quang Dien District, Phu Vang District and Huong Tra Town. Sponsors, partners and local authorities were quickly contacted for mobilizing resources, considering current difficulties and needs, as well as finding feasible solutions. Fortunately, at that time, responding to ACDC's call as part of a USAID-funded activity, many organizations, including suppliers and volunteers, joined hands. Beneficiaries were carefully selected so as not to miss anyone out or choose the wrong people. It was a hard time during those days of going from door to door to visit beneficiaries on the list, but no mistakes were allowed. Persons with disabilities who already received support from other organizations or did not meet the criteria were replaced by households in difficult circumstances and in need of more help.

The project team spent every hour, every minute making detailed plans and forming sub-teams to distribute gifts by commune clusters so that persons with disabilities did not need to travel too far. At 5a.m every day, all team members gathered at the meeting point to depart. Each van brought love and consideration to persons with disabilities and their families. During that time, a lot of houses still flooded and local officers had to deal with the post-storm surge situation, so they could not always join the team. Plus, the area was large, so it was difficult to reach persons with disabilities' families. Nevertheless, the “warriors” did not falter and still visited each household with local people’s help, trying to reach and provide the best support for persons with disabilities.

650 gift sets, each of which contains essentials, kitchen utensils, beddings, and 140 ceramic filters were delivered to 650 persons with disabilities and persons with disabilities' families in Thua Thien Hue Province. In addition, the team assisted two primary schools in Quang Dien District and Phong Dien District which suffered heavy damage due to the floods with 120 desk and chair sets and 120 textbook sets. Hoang Thi Chinh, 84 years old, who has a physical disability, currently living alone in Tu Ha, Huong Tra Town, Thua Thien – Hue Province, touchingly said: *“Guys, the gift set is so big! I haven’t received such a big gift set before. It has everything, from a pot, a pan to cooking oil and fish sauce. I’m very happy.”*



The project provided 2000 relief packages for 2000 households with persons with disabilities in Quang Tri Province, Quang Nam Province and Thua Thien - Hue Province.



The whole team smiled. Such sincere sharing made them feel warm. The gratitude from local people to them every day dispelled much of their fatigue.

Visiting Chinh again during the cold days at the end of the year, the survey team still saw her small mossy house and the project’s gift set was in use. She warmly welcomed the team on their arrival and particularly showed off the ceramic filter, the project’s gift, which has been very useful. After purifying, the quality of the water is much more reassuring.

Although the relief package has not been able to compensate for the damage caused by the storm surges, it has given persons with disabilities motivation and hopes to rebuild their lives. When a gift is given, there is a smile in return. And each trip is a journey to spread love.

PROMPTLY IN THE STORM SURGES



Trieu Phong District, Quang Tri Province was the first locality to receive the storm surge relief package from ACDC's relief team as part of a USAID-supported relief activity. Speed and accuracy were the key factors during this trip.

From October 6th to October 21st, 9 out of 10 districts in Quang Tri Province were heavily affected by the floods, 94 out of 124 communes, with 61,393 households, flooded (193,972 people). Around 5% of those are persons with disabilities and their families. 50 people passed away, 4 went missing and 25 people were injured. Nearly 200 houses were severely damaged. More than 200 schools with 1,000 classrooms struck by the floods and strong winds were in need of new roofs, doors, windows, walls and floor. Teaching and learning materials and equipment, books, notebooks and furniture were ruined. Trieu Phong District was chosen as the first destination of the relief team. This place suffered heavy extensive damage, with 17,000 households (53,100 people) including 4,042 persons with disabilities³.

During the first days of November 2020, suppliers were urgently contacted and agreements were reached; the criteria, number of communes/districts and the expected time for relief package distribution were also quickly specified. Six communes with 200 households of persons with disabilities in Trieu Phong District received support on November 11th-12th, 2020. There was still a likelihood that Typhoon Vamco would hit Quang Tri Province.

The plan was sent to the local authorities and everyone was worried. A representative of Trieu Phong District Association of Persons with Disabilities and Agent Orange Victims, Sponsorship for Persons with Disabilities and Child Rights Protection said: “It was too urgent, how could we be prepared? There are only three members to make a list of 200 households in six communes according to the criteria”. Despite complaints, the Association’s members still completed their task by submitting the list of 200 households of persons with disabilities in 6 communes of Trieu Phong District, 50 of which received SWACF ceramic filters, by the deadline. On November 11th-12th, the support package was distributed as planned in Trieu Phong District while there was still rain, winds and floods in some communes like Trieu Ai Commune and Trieu Do Commune. persons with disabilities and team members were faced with a lot of difficulties during their travel because some routes and houses were swamped due to the 6th flood. However, the distribution was completed according to the plan. The beneficiaries were very happy with their gift sets. They said: “The gift set is sufficient for them to eat and sleep”; “We have received rice and instant noodles, but this time, there are a lot of things to eat and even warm blankets for the winter”; “It is really good to have the water filter. The water in my well is full of alum.”

The relief was rapidly provided in the face of unfavorable weather conditions and difficulties in all aspects. The gift sets have reached the beneficiaries in accordance with the criteria when they needed the most. A representative

³ According to the Flash Report No.38 issued by Commanding Committee of Natural Disaster Prevention and Control, Search and Rescue on October 9th, 2020



of Trieu Phong District Association of Persons with Disabilities and Agent Orange Victims, Sponsorship for Persons with Disabilities and Child Rights Protection said: *When hearing the plan, we were worried and lamented it, but above all, for the sake of persons with disabilities, we had to do our best. Immediately, we clearly identified the objectives and beneficiaries, then cooperated with policy officers and grassroots Association officers to assign staff to be in charge and provide support. We always encouraged each other to complete our tasks. This time, representatives of leaders of USAID and ACDC joined us in person and this was also the first locality that they visited. We were delighted and proud to welcome them and work with such enthusiastic people.* Assessing the relief program for persons with disabilities

in Quang Tri Province affected by the floods in general, Thai Vinh Lieu - Chairman of Association of Persons with Disabilities and Agent Orange Victims, Sponsorship for Persons with disabilities and Child Rights Protection - said: *“ACDC offered the relief package very promptly and it was suitable for persons with disabilities’ difficult conditions after the floods.”*

So, 650 gift sets, 140 ceramic filters, 120 textbook sets and 120 desk and chair sets were distributed in this relief program. It is the enthusiasm of different parties, including sponsors, local authorities, unions, volunteers and suppliers that made this trip meaningful.



WHERE THERE'S A WILL, THERE'S A WAY



“Where there’s a will, there’s a way” is our guideline during the urgent relief program for persons with disabilities to overcome the storm surges in Quang Nam Province.

Within only 10 days (from October 6th to October 17th, 2020), storms and floods continually struck provinces in Central Vietnam, including Quang Nam Province. The damage to people’s lives and property was indescribable. The statistics provided by Quang Nam Provincial Steering Committee for Prevention of Natural Disasters, Search and Rescue were shocking: 11 people passed away; 41 were injured; more than 500 houses were completely destroyed; 60 schools were severely affected; 127 classrooms were submerged by floodwater; 634 hectares of rice and 2,700 hectares of crops were damaged; 1,266 trees fell; 306 tons of food were ruined; 700 cattle and 150,000 poultry died. The total damage cost was 1,480 billion dong. People’s lives faced numerous difficulties. Particularly, persons with disabilities were among the most affected groups and had limited access to rescue efforts during the disaster.

In the context of the sudden disaster, in parallel with other relief programs across the country and with support from USAID, ACDC cooperated with local partners in urgently carrying out the relief program to assist households of persons with disabilities affected by the storm surges. Due to limited resources, the most severely damaged districts were given top priority. Dai Loc District, Thang Binh District, Duy Xuyen District, Nong Son District and Nam Tra My District were selected. The objective was to ensure the relief package

could reach people who needed them the most for the shortest duration and with the greatest efforts.

While the plan was developed, bad weather appeared to be a major setback. The rain was heavy, storms were still lurking, roads were eroded, many places were still badly flooded, some villages were even isolated for a long time and must be relocated for residents’ safety. The urgent relief plan had to be rescheduled for 10 days later to ensure everyone would be safe. Our desire to provide the fastest support for persons with disabilities who were in distress and hindered by the weather kept us on tenterhooks.

In addition to the obstacles caused by the natural disaster, we encountered many other problems such as: choosing suitable locations for certain beneficiaries, arranging proper schedules in conditions of heavy workload and limited human resource, supervising the selection of beneficiaries in accordance with the given criteria, choosing appropriate suppliers when goods became scarce, etc. However, with the spirit – “Where there’s a will, there’s a way”, we understood that whether this activity would be a success and provide timely and practical support for persons with disabilities or not depended on two factors: our detailed and careful planning, and mobilization of local partners’ enthusiastic and active participation.

A plan, including backups, was quickly outlined. We promptly contacted suppliers of essentials, water filters, desks and chairs, textbooks, etc. to plan the transportation to each area. Meetings among parties

took place quickly with strong consensus; field surveys were also conducted according to the plan. The advance visit to each household of persons with disabilities also left us with many memories. The weather conditions were unfavorable while there were a large number of people that had to be reviewed. Above all, with their damaged villages and houses after the storm surges, many families were in need of support, but our relief package was limited, which made us very upset.

As soon as preparations were done, our relief team went to each location to assist the residents. We started working from 4a.m to 5a.m. The convoy of vans travelled to the meeting point, then were divided into small groups to support households in the most difficult circumstances. The distribution went on till the end of each working day. In the evening, we double-checked and re-arranged the relief on vans so that we could depart to another location in time the next morning. The amount of relief was huge while the roads were difficult, but with careful preparations, everything went smoothly.

Luu Thi Bich Ngoc - Head of Project Management Unit, Deputy Director of Quang Nam Provincial Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs said: *“When I first heard about the plan, I was very worried because it was urgent and the workload was excessive. However, the project has mobilized a strong and professional team of supporters, then achieved greater success than I expected”*. Hua Quoc Dung - Chairman of Quang Nam Provincial OPD stated: *“The gift sets are so meaningful. It is very practical because the winter is coming and everyone can use them immediately.”*



The residents' excitement and expectations also gave us motivation during the relief program.

“For us, this gift set is very valuable, especially this water filter.”

“I find the gift sets very practical, containing not only food, but also beddings and kitchen utensils. These are extremely helpful for persons with disabilities.”

Such sharing urged us to do better and provide more effective assistance during the program.

The relief program was a success thanks to the efforts of many individuals and parties. We believe that although the relief package was not big, it offered prompt support both physically and mentally, helping persons with disabilities overcome their difficulties and settle after the disaster./

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