

**Disability and World Bank Safeguards  
Case Studies**

**"The National Inclusion Project" in Lebanon  
2005-2007**

**Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union**

**May 6, 2013**

## **Introduction**

“Our dream is a world free of poverty” is the mission of the World Bank.<sup>1</sup> The Bank’s adopted policies, together with its environmental and social safeguard policies currently under review, form the core of its efforts to protect both people and the environment.

This case study will highlight one of the most important projects that was financed by the World Bank in Lebanon, “The National Inclusion Project, 2005 – 2007.” The National Inclusion Project (NIP) is a \$750,000 project that is part of the broader Community Development Project (CDP) in Lebanon that ran from 2001 to 2008. The total project cost of the CDP was \$30 million, with \$20 million coming through an investment loan from the World Bank.<sup>2</sup> The NIP is considered the first initiative of its kind on the national level in Lebanon working on social, vocational and educational inclusion for persons with disabilities (PWDs). It is the outcome of joint efforts of a consortium of four associations financed by the World Bank with the distinguished management of the Council of Development and Reconstruction (CDR), which is one of the main public institutions that supervises World Bank funding in Lebanon.

The overall objective of the project was to establish the appropriate infrastructure for social, educational and vocational inclusion for PWDs in Lebanon. It was an attempt to address the real problem of isolation and marginalization experienced by people with disabilities, ultimately rooted in the nationally adopted social sector related policies. Furthermore, the project’s immediate objectives were to:

- Empower PWDs and their families to advocate for their rights through inclusive policies;
- Reinforce the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schooling programs; and
- Disseminate and promote inclusive policies and culture.

To institutionalize inclusion of persons with disabilities into World Bank operations, the World Bank must include disability and inclusive development in its environmental and social safeguard policies so that persons with disabilities are not harmed by World Bank projects and so that mitigation strategies can be formed to prevent any such harm. This is especially true given that persons with disabilities are among the most impoverished and most marginalized groups that are subjected to harm in the countries where Bank projects are being implemented. Most communities in which persons with disabilities live are lacking the minimum accessibility and inclusion standards, leading to deprivation from the simplest of rights for persons with disabilities. The World Bank must specifically address the needs of persons with disabilities and cannot continue to discuss the rights of persons with disabilities among those of marginalized groups given the accommodations that might need to be made in the fields of infrastructure – roads & transportation- information and communication technology (ICT), and others.

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<sup>1</sup> The World Bank Group. “Poverty Overview.” Available: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview>.

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank. “Community Development Project.” Available: <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P071113/community-development-project-cdp?lang=en>.

Furthermore, considering the issue of disability is of utmost importance, since it will help the World Bank uphold its mission. Involving and including persons with disabilities will increase communities' productivity by increasing the labor market to include people with disabilities.

### **General Background**

According to the unofficial data estimates on disability mentioned in the recent study on disability and the Lebanese labor market produced by the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU) in 2011, persons with disabilities account for 10% of the population in Lebanon and for 1% according to the national statistic.<sup>3</sup> This discrepancy between both rates is due to the lack of a standard definition of disability and the stigma associated with disability as families do not feel comfortable disclosing that their children have disabilities. There are 83,000 persons with disabilities for whom the Ministry of Social Affairs has issued a disability card in 2011.<sup>4</sup> According to the most recent estimates, the actual number of persons with disabilities was estimated at 150,000 in 2006.<sup>5</sup> Most of these persons with disabilities live in isolation from the community in special institutions, suffering from marginalization and discrimination.<sup>6</sup> This is a result of a lack of both an inclusive culture and environment in Lebanon and in the non-enforcement of the Lebanese law of the rights of persons with disabilities (No. 220/2000) pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities.

There are many challenges limiting the access of persons with disabilities to basic services. Many cannot enroll in a school or university since these institutions are not physically accessible. This has led to skyrocketing illiteracy rates among persons with disabilities, reaching 50.4% according to some studies.<sup>7</sup> There is also a large labor market problem. Many companies and institutions would hire a person with a disability, but it is not possible because these companies and institutions are not physically accessible. The result is a frighteningly high unemployment rate among persons with disabilities. According to a study undertaken by the Ministry of Social

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<sup>3</sup> Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union. Disability and the Lebanese Labor Market.

<sup>4</sup> The National Report submitted to the UN Sustainable Development Conference (Rio + 20), Sustainable Development in Lebanon: the Current Status and the Vision, by Mr. Kareem El Gasr and Ms Capricia Shbarekh, for the Ministry of Environment, in her capacity as coordinator of the UN Sustainable Development Conference, with support from the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs and the UNDP, Pdf file, page 10.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Augaspian, former minister in the Lebanese government at the inauguration of the National Seminar on the Law Enforcing Mechanism 220/2000, sponsored by "Thoughts Program – supporting the civil society" run by the Ministry of State for Administrative Development Affairs funded by the EU, 12/5/2006.

<sup>6</sup> El Nahar Newspaper, press report entitled: inclusion of persons with disabilities in the Lebanese community: when will the law become reality, so that the minimum steps can be achieved? Press report by: Rolla Makhayel, Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> of December 2004.

<sup>7</sup> MDGs (Millennium Development Goals), Lebanon Report 2008, The Lebanese Republic and the United Nations, main author Ziad Abdel Samad, Network of Arab NGOs for Development, the coordinator: Zeina Aly Ahmed, UNDP, printed at the print shop of Dar El Kotob, p.15

Affairs, the rate of unemployed persons with disabilities amounts to 83%, whereby the rate of those among them living under the poverty line is 43.8%.<sup>8</sup>

The Youth Association of the Blind (YAB), the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union (LPHU), the Lebanese Down Syndrome Association (LDSA), and Save the Children Sweden formed a consortium to pursue a solution to the problem of segregation and stigma against persons with disabilities, focusing specifically on the right to education in mainstream school programs. This consortium crystallized in the National Inclusion Project which was funded by the World Bank and supervised by the Lebanese Council for Development and Reconstruction. This partnership between the World Bank and the Lebanese public sector and disabled people's organizations (DPOs) opened a significant window for including and supporting the project, since it develops the necessary infrastructure allowing the adoption and implementation of comprehensive policies. The project will provide a series of tools of mechanisms for spreading the practice of inclusive education, including: relevant programs for awareness raising and media campaign and capacity building activities and workshops for schools' administrations, teachers, and relevant stakeholders in both the public and private sectors. The goal of the program design is to introduce the culture of inclusion that would replace the ongoing segregation, discrimination, and stigmatization practiced through welfare institutions. Accordingly, designing and introducing the project was a real attempt to solve this problem.

### **Project Description**

The NIP is the outcome of joint efforts of a consortium of four associations<sup>9</sup> financed by the World Bank with the distinguished management of the Council of Development and Reconstruction (CDR), which is one of the main public institutions that supervises World Bank funding in Lebanon.

The overall objective of the project was to establish the appropriate infrastructure for social, educational and vocational inclusion for PWDs in Lebanon. It was an attempt to address the real problem of isolation and marginalization experienced by people with disabilities, ultimately rooted in the nationally adopted social sector related policies. Furthermore, the project's immediate objectives were to:

- Empower PWDs and their families to advocate for their rights through inclusive policies;
- Reinforce the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream schooling programs; and
- Disseminate and promote inclusive policies and culture.

In order to realize these objectives, activities were designed in the educational, social and vocational fields. It is worth noting that the project took a multi-sectoral approach, with 50% of the activities focused in the education field, 30% covered the social aspects and 20% in the vocational field.

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<sup>8</sup> El Safir Newspaper 17/12/2009.

<sup>9</sup> LPHU was one of the four organizations funded by the World Bank to work on the NIP.

The main challenge for the NIP was the formulation and design of a project introducing cultural change to promote socio-economic inclusion and disability mainstreaming. It was a real challenge for the Consortium to come up with a feasible project to address issues of stigma and discrimination. Therefore, the development of the project proposal document required the additional expertise to provide the necessary technical support for drafting the project proposal in addition to the technical guidance of the manual developed by the Council of Development and Reconstruction.

The second challenge faced was designing the implementation strategy and activities of the project. It was difficult to design activities that would be inclusive when the existing infrastructure perpetuates inequality. So, it was agreed to focus on the activities that fulfill the following outcomes:

- Building human resource capacity in inclusion, which is essential for any progress in this respect in Lebanon, where these resources are short of providing the necessary basis for an inclusive infrastructure;
- Raising the awareness of the decision makers, and others, as the dominant mentality is clearly 'exclusive' and is far from promoting an inclusive approach;
- Convincing people of the feasibility of the approach, using the successful example of the existing inclusive schools;
- Ensuring the technical and professional development of the workers skills and competencies, through the development of written materials;
- Introducing change in the national social, educational and vocational strategies, which is a must for the promotion of inclusion in an exclusive policy environment; and
- Supporting advocacy groups, including disabled people's organizations, to follow up on these policies and promote their adoption and implementation.

### **Project Outcomes**

According to the recently endorsed World Bank and WHO World report on Disability, the number of people with disabilities accounts for 15% of the world population, most of whom live in developing countries.<sup>10</sup> The WHO estimates show that the number of persons with disabilities in the Arab World is around 40 million, more than half of whom are children and adolescents, facing marginalization from the community and considered poor.<sup>11</sup> This marginalization is due to the fact that disability and poverty are closely linked. It is poor infrastructure that creates barriers obstructing inclusion in the community, depriving persons with disabilities from education, work and from participating in the community. They are discriminated against and often deprived of the simplest of their rights. As for the right to education, UNESCO estimations show that 90% of

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<sup>10</sup> The World Health Organization and the World Bank. World Report on Disability. Available: [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf), Page 44.

<sup>11</sup> Arab Council for Childhood and Development, website: <http://www.arabccd.org/page/866>

children with disabilities in developing countries are not enrolled in schools.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, persons with disabilities are deprived of the right to work and the right to live independently and freely. This is due to the lack of national policies as well as clear international standards for ensuring an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities. Instead of governments and bilateral and multilateral donors pushing further toward promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, strategies of disability mainstreaming and inclusion are yet not addressed systematically through their funded projects and initiatives.

This sad reality of persons with disabilities is also prevalent in Lebanon. The illiteracy rate among persons with disabilities is 50.4%, while the rate of unemployed among them is 83%.<sup>13</sup> A number of studies have shown that the poverty rate among persons with disabilities is three times as much as the national poverty rate,<sup>14</sup> whereby those poor disabled living under the poverty line account for 43.8%.<sup>15</sup>

The above statistics highlight the importance of the National Inclusion Project that has been financed by the World Bank and which aims to create an infrastructure for inclusion. The project aligns with the Bank's objectives to eliminate poverty, and enhances further opportunities of equity and inclusion for PWDs in the process of development. This project is considered a major step towards protecting and safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities and removing the harm that they are subjected to. This project has, among other aspects, instilled a culture of inclusion within the community compared with several previous non-inclusive projects that aim to solve some of the problems of persons with disabilities within specialized, segregated institutions. These segregated programs harm persons with disabilities by providing low quality, high cost education that does not train persons with disabilities to enter post-secondary education or the labor market and continues to promote stigma within society are now being replaced by inclusive programs. The change in culture and structure of the education sector in Lebanon is highlighted below:

- The Ministry of Education is more willing to adopt the systematic integration of disability standards in its educational programs by providing adequate capacity within its own relevant bodies and mainstream schools. In 2012, the Ministry endorsed a national policy document for education reform in its affiliated public schools entitled the National Plan for Inclusive Education in Lebanon. This document describes the adoption of a new structure of the Ministry itself, including the formation of an Inclusive Education

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<sup>12</sup> Arab Council for Childhood and Development, website: <http://www.arabccd.org/page/866>

<sup>13</sup> Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union and Dr. Fares Al-Zain. Disability and the Labor Market in Lebanon. Pages 3-10. (2011).

<sup>14</sup> MDGs, Lebanon Report, 2008, The Republic of Lebanon and the UN; main author Ziad Abdel Samad, Network of Arab NGOs for Development, the coordinator: Zeina Aly Ahmed, UNDP, printed at the print shop of Dar El Kotob, p.15

<sup>15</sup> Work program of the Lebanese government to consolidate the social safety networks and increase the means of obtaining the basic social services. 22. January 2007, Pdf file, page 6, website of Rebuild Lebanon: [http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb/images\\_Gallery/SocialActionPlanEnglishAr220107pdf](http://www.rebuildlebanon.gov.lb/images_Gallery/SocialActionPlanEnglishAr220107pdf)

Management Unit. This Unit will consist of three staff and will be responsible for producing all necessary modules for the systematic implementation of inclusive education through mainstream schools around the country.<sup>16</sup>

- According to a national report produced by the National Center of Educational Research and Development affiliated to the Ministry of Education in 2012 entitled *Monitoring the Integration of Students with Special Needs in the Public Schooling Programs in Lebanon*, the number of mainstream schools interested in adopting the practice of inclusion has recently increased to around 100 schools.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, many of these schools reached out to NIP seeking its technical assistance for designing and implementing inclusive education programs.
- The same report shows that despite funding shortages and the lack of sufficient technical support at mainstream schools, the number of children with special needs registered at these schools has increased to 139 Deaf and hard of hearing students, 243 students with physical disabilities, 321 students with intellectual disabilities, and 734 students with visual impairments, compared to the period before the launch of NIP.<sup>18</sup> This is a significant increase given that most children with disabilities, if not all, were in segregated schools before NIP.
- Mainstream schools, municipalities, and higher education institutions have become more engaged in holding awareness raising activities, including roundtable discussions, specialized panel sessions, and training workshops. Parents of children with disabilities are also being integrated into parents committees at mainstream schools advocating for inclusive education to promote the culture of inclusion.

An increasing number of PWDs, today, have access to mainstream schools and vocational rehabilitation programs as mentioned in the previous section.<sup>19</sup> Both the public and private sector recognize that PWDs are no longer a burden on society, but are able to participate in the process of development. Thus, these sectors started to ensure increasing and equal opportunities for PWDs to leadership, education, employment and vocational training. It is worth remembering that the access to such rights was limited to the abovementioned segregated and stigmatizing programs.

According to NIP's final report to the World Bank in 2007, the project's success is many fold. The project has provided technical support to 10 schools for adopting inclusive education programs.<sup>20</sup> Today, Lebanon has more than 30 inclusive private schools and about 100 semi-

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<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Education, Lebanon. National Plan for Inclusive Education in Lebanon.

<sup>17</sup> National Center for Educational Research and Development. *Monitoring the Integration of Students with Special Needs into the Public Schools in Lebanon*. 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Amer Makarem. *The Final Report of the NIP to the World Bank*. 2007.

inclusive private schools. In addition, the Ministry of Education, at the beginning of 2007, launched a national initiative for promoting the practice of inclusive education within public schools. This initiative is functioning today under the supervision of the National Program for Inclusive Education that was approved by the Ministry of Education in 2009, under the name of the National Inclusion Programme in Lebanon (NIPL). It is being funded by the Italian government and the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Saint Joseph University are participating in the program. To include persons with disabilities in the labor force, the Ministry of Social Affairs and LPHU also started the National Center for Supporting the Employment of Persons with Disabilities in 2011.

In summary, the National Inclusion Project has paved the way in raising the educational and social standards of persons with disabilities while providing them with the opportunity to become educated and employed. This project has achieved positive impacts for persons with disabilities, rendering them more independent and productive. Accordingly, this has created the momentum to reduce their poverty level and make them less reliant on social welfare programs. In general, their communities have thus benefitted from increased productivity brought about by involving and including persons with disabilities in their environment.

The project has also emphasized the need for adopting the culture of inclusion for PWDs and other vulnerable groups. This has been achieved through including persons with disabilities in their communities rather than leaving them living in isolation in special care institutions. NIP, today, continues to create an inclusive environment in the educational, social and vocational sense. It is considered the first of its kind on the national level in Lebanon. A great number of persons with different disabilities have benefited from it. As mentioned previously, the project has succeeded in building a solid ground to create an environment suitable for inclusion.

On the other hand, it is necessary to note that the World Bank has not continued to support inclusive education in Lebanon after this project ended in 2007. Efforts on inclusive education are being maintained through the support of other funding resources. While the Bank argues that the Lebanese government lacks any interest in requesting additional funding for such initiatives, NIP and other governmental programs continue to collaborate on creating and maintaining more national inclusive education policies as it is mentioned above.

More critically, it should be noted that the Bank has refrained from integrating any minimum standards for inclusion for persons with disabilities in any project it has funded in Lebanon after 2007. The discontinuation of an inclusive project with disability standards has also been encountered through later Bank's sponsorship of the reconstruction of mainstream school buildings that were destroyed during the 2006 war. When DPOs challenged the Bank country office, particularly the NIP members, about the neglect of inclusion standards in such projects, they did not receive any response.

## **Conclusion**



This case study uses the NIP project as a positive example for integrating disability and inclusive development into the World Bank Safeguard policies that underscores how including persons with disabilities benefits the society at large. This project is considered to be of such importance due to its pioneering role in enhancing the spread of the culture of inclusion, and thus the recognition of the rights of Lebanese disabled persons. Of course, since disability is not covered by the current World Bank safeguards, DPOs cannot claim any harm caused by these projects for persons with disabilities. Nonetheless, the lack of consistency in World Bank projects of essential standards of accessibility has hindered the enhancement of opportunities of inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream education programs.

Despite the support given by the World Bank on the implementation of disability projects, such as NIP and other similar projects worldwide, the integration of disability into the Bank's safeguard policies is one of many steps that the Bank should pursue for enhancing opportunities of inclusion for persons with disabilities. The World Bank must give more attention to the issue of disability and not treat it as a mere segment of a larger, vulnerable group. Rather, the Bank must systematically integrate disability throughout its operations. It is imperative that the Bank pay specific attention to this issue, especially since persons with disabilities are often some of the poorest and most vulnerable persons in countries where World Bank projects are implemented.

To increase development effectiveness, one of these essential steps that the World Bank should consider is the issue of disability within its safeguard policies. Furthermore, considering such a step should inspire those engaging with the Bank, whether client members or other bilateral and multilateral financial institutions and donors, to pursue the adoption of similar safeguard policies.

To maintain further consistency in its commitment to development effectiveness, the Bank must:

- Make clear references to issues of disability mainstreaming in all its safeguard components and scopes;
- Pursue all necessary structural measures and arrangements for enhancing its own capacity toward providing the necessary technical support required to implement a disability sensitive safeguard policy;
- Identify outreach strategies to its lending members and trust funds for securing the necessary financing capacity toward the implementation of these safeguards;
- Create clear mechanisms for monitoring borrowing countries' commitment toward scaling up its national policies to adopt the minimum standards of disability mainstreaming in all projects sponsored by the World Bank; and
- Expand the safeguards' scope to cover other lending instruments, primarily development policy loans and performance for results, which have a critical impact on determining borrowing countries' policies concerning issues of disability rights and inclusion.

By taking the lead in adopting such a safeguard policy, the Bank will be doing a great favor, not only to persons with disabilities, but also to the communities in which they live. It is well recognized by all disability stakeholders worldwide that an inclusive environment can benefit persons without disabilities, especially the elderly, pregnant women, those using children's strollers, and others.

For the World Bank to make a successful project like the "National Inclusion Project," it has to work to include the issue of disability and sustainable development in all of its relevant safeguard policies. An accessible environment for persons with disabilities that takes into consideration the educational, social and vocational inclusion will guarantee that those persons remain in their countries and their communities with dignity and enable them to enjoy their full rights just as those without disabilities do.

Furthermore, we call upon the World Bank to uphold -together with adopting the issue of disability as one of its safeguard policies- international human rights standards, especially those pertaining to persons with disabilities, and to use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities as a model for enhancing opportunities of inclusive development and disability mainstreaming, primarily in areas, such as education, health care, employment, and political participation.

In conclusion, having the World Bank adopt the issue of disability and sustainable development in its safeguard policies will lead to creating a world that is inclusive, obstacle-free and ensures that every individual, whatever his/her disability, will become effective and productive. Following this approach will help the World Bank achieve its objectives set out in its safeguard policies. It will also assist in optimally achieving its mission, since giving attention to the issue of disability will positively reflect on local communities at large. The productivity of communities will increase upon involving and including persons with disabilities, who will thus become effective, active and independent persons. This would be a further important step towards combating poverty.