

Programme Area Summary

Country: Sri Lanka

Programme Area: Disability 2005-2010

What is the aim of the programme area?

People with disabilities participate equally in society

Why is VSO working in that particular Programme Area and region?

The situation of people with disabilities in Sri Lanka is no exception to the general situation in developing countries around the world i.e. they have limited access to their basic rights, leading to economic and social exclusion. The Government of Sri Lanka and several non-government organisations have taken various steps to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities.

VSOSL has been working in the disability sector for the past few years by placing volunteers in local organisations to build their capacity in managing and delivering disability-related programmes. VSO has also been networking with a wider range of stakeholders in the disability sector and seeking new ways in which to work. Hence, VSOSL is in a position to complement the various efforts being made by the Government and other DPOs and NGOs in line with the National Policy to promote and protect the rights of people with disabilities.

Key beneficiaries and partners

The direct beneficiaries will be VSOSL's partner organisations and their staff, who will benefit from improved organisational capacity and improved skills to work with people with disabilities. The indirect beneficiaries will be men, women and children with disabilities and their families. While many partners work with all sections of the community, some have a focus on or special programmes for children, and one partner works mostly with women with disabilities. Most partners work with disadvantaged communities such as rural or internally displaced communities.

VSO Sri Lanka is currently in the process of identifying suitable partners and developing long-term partnerships in the disability programme. It has existing partnerships or will form partnerships with the following types of organisation:

- Disabled People's Organisations working on advocacy and strengthening the disability movement to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities in the country.
- NGOs working on disability issues. Most will have CBR programmes or have the potential to begin or link up with existing CBR programmes.
- Government Departments and bodies that are responsible for disability issues and services.

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

- Strengthened advocacy by Disabled People's Organisations to promote disability as a mainstream issue.
This objective relates to the lack of voice of people with disabilities and their marginalisation from the mainstream. Whilst strong legislative and policy frameworks for this exist, implementation of them is patchy. Strengthened advocacy can lead to a stronger voice of the disability movement so that their issues are taken into account by the government and other development policymakers and actors.

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- Improved Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) programmes to enable people with disabilities to access their rights and participate in their communities. This objective relates to the marginalisation of people with disabilities in their communities due to barriers they face and poor access to basic rights at the grassroots level. Improved CBR programmes will create awareness and change attitudes among the wider community and people with disabilities themselves, whilst improving their access to their rights and facilitating their inclusion and fuller participation in their communities.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- VSOSL's work on building the capacity of DPOs to strengthen their advocacy programmes mostly requires volunteers with organisational development and management skills. For example, volunteers will be involved in strategic planning, setting up management systems within organisations, training and coaching staff in various aspects such as fundraising.
- For community based work, a wide range of volunteer skills is required. This includes volunteers with management and related skills to work on building the organisational capacity of organisations working on CBR, as well as social and community development skills. It will also require specific clinical skills such as physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy.

Workshops, training & conferences

- VSOSL facilitates 3 workshops a year for partners and volunteers, to facilitate learning on a particular issue such as advocacy, as well as to provide an opportunity for partners to network and share best practice and other information.

Research

- VSOSL hopes to support partners on research on disability issues, e.g. gender and disability.

Advocacy and Global Education

- VSOSL will support the advocacy efforts of partners, especially those of Disabled People's Organisations, to protect and promote the rights of people with disabilities.

Partner exchange visits/study tours

- VSOSL supports partners in exchange visits between organisations in country to observe work and implement learning into their own organisations. VSOSL organised a LINKS study tour to Thailand in 2004, which highlighted the need and the positive impact of networking and shared learning in the disability sector in the country.

Providing grants and/or equipment for partners

- Partners can access small grants through VSO for pieces of work which might otherwise be difficult to fund.

Development of publications or other materials for training or communication

- VSOSL supports publication of materials for training or communication, e.g. information leaflets or booklets designed by volunteers.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

The post-tsunami context in Sri Lanka has emphasised the importance of capacity building in the NGO sector in general, which includes disability NGOs and DPOs. VSO has a proven track record in capacity building of local organisations and individuals, leading to greater sustainability in the long-term.

There is a real lack of trained disability-related professionals in Sri Lanka and VSOSL has access to a range of trained professionals. Hence, VSOSL is able to match this demand

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with a supply of volunteers to enhance the availability of services for people with disabilities.

There are a handful of international development organisations working on disability issues in the country. Some of them focus on a particular aspect of disability or on a certain geographical area. Hence, there is a niche for VSOSL to work in, which complements the work of other organisations without duplicating what is already being done.