

# USAID DISABILITY POLICY PAPER AND ACTION PLAN

## USAID/ECUADOR COMMENTS

### 1. GENERAL

Although USAID/Ecuador does not now have specific activities that address the problems of individuals with disabilities as part of its Strategic Plan and framework, it finds the Agency's Policy Paper and Action Plan on the subject to be an excellent tool to guide Missions in undertaking actions that take into account the problems of people that suffer from some type of disability. In the case of USAID/Ecuador, and its status as a close-out Mission by the year 2003, with diminishing DP, OE and staff resources, it is unlikely that this Unit will be in a position to undertake any major service oriented endeavor or implement models to address such problems. However, there is most certainly ample room to incorporate the Policy Objectives mentioned in the USAID Policy Paper on Disability, i.e.: promoting the equal opportunities and participation of individuals with disabilities within the existing country strategy; and, advocating for and increasing the awareness of people with disabilities in ongoing dialogue with our partners in the public and private sectors, the GOE, and the donor community.

### 2. USAID/ECUADOR PAST EXPERIENCE

Given the fact that Ecuador has a high incidence of children born with some kind of physical or mental disability, USAID/Ecuador has had a long history of providing assistance to individuals suffering from disabilities and supporting local organizations that deal with this issue. For example, in FY 1980, the Mission financed a four-year Operational Program Grant (OPG) with the Guayaquil-based NGO "Foundation for the Educational and Psychological Assistance to Mentally Retarded Children and Adults" (FASINARM) in the amount of US\$380,000. Such OPG was designed to provide handicapped children and youths with technical skills training to enable them to eventually be gainfully employed in local industry. Through agreements with local industries, the USAID funding permitted FASINARM to create "protected classrooms" where the handicapped were taught job related skills and actually worked in different segments of line production such as packaging and quality control.

Subsequently to the OPG with FASINARM, USAID/Ecuador has utilized the Special Development Activity Authority (SDAA) fund to finance a series of activities directly benefitting children, youths and adults with disabilities, specially in the area of technical skills (vocational) training. In so doing, the Ecuador Mission has focused its attention in supporting local NGOs that address the educational and medical attention needs, particularly of low-income individuals with disabilities. Illustratively, some of the NGOs that have received SDAA funding, only over the past four years, are: the Ecuadorian General Foundation, the Special Olympics Foundation (which has also received extensive support over the years from the U.S. Embassy), the Institute for Special Education, the New Life Foundation, the Parents, Friends Children and Youths Foundation, the National Association for the Blind (ADEINCE), the Association for the Integrated Development of Special Children, the Down Syndrome Children Foundation, the Special Education "Sharing" Foundation, the San Juan of Jerusalem Center for Cerebral Palsy, the Children's Chapter of the Association for Assistance to People with Incurable Diseases and the Municipal Center of Quevedo for Children with Disabilities. These groups are but a few of the many NGOs that provide attention to the handicapped throughout Ecuador, principally in the coastal and highland geographical regions of the country.

### 3. OTHER USAID ACTIVITIES ON DISABILITIES

In addition to the above mentioned OPG and SDAA activities, USAID/Ecuador has paid continued attention to the problems of people suffering from physical or mental disabilities within the context of activities included in its present strategic framework. Some examples are:

**a. Health and Family Planning**

The Association for the Wellbeing of the Ecuadorian Family (APROFE) and the Medical Center for Family Orientation and Planning (CEMOPLAF), the two leading family planning NGOs in the country, provide services without discrimination to any individual with disabilities that requests their assistance. For example, women with the down syndrome who are referred by clinics and maternity hospitals, receive free FP /MCH services in both institutions.

APROFE is also presently negotiating an agreement with FASINARM to provide education and MCH services to individuals with disabilities.

CEMOPLAF provides financial support to two organizations that work with the blind. Each of these organizations has a commercial radio station to generate income for their activities and CEMOPLAF contributes to their institutional objective through the purchase of radio space to broadcast messages on family planning.

An excess property medical equipment donation recently received by the Mission included items such as beds and wheel chairs, which have been donated to NGOs for the disabled.

**b. Microenterprise Development**

Although USAID/Ecuador is not presently financing a specific program on microenterprise lending or technical assistance for the disadvantaged, existing activities are open to receive applications from individuals or groups suffering from disabilities. In fact, there are several disabled women who have received credit under the village banking program.

The village banking program managed by FINCA/Ecuador, is working with the New Life Foundation (mentioned above as an SDAA recipient), in order to establish two village banks specifically designed to provide credit to groups that receive attention from the Foundation. This activity is expected to be launched in the summer of 1988.

Banco Solidario, a local microenterprise lending institution supported by USAID/Ecuador, has presented a project proposal to the Municipality of Quito that is intended to provide credit to individuals with disabilities that live in the Quito metropolitan area. Depending on the Municipality's interest in this topic, the program could be initiated in the next two or three months.

**c. Civil Society Strengthening**

In 1996, CLD maintained a series of meetings with fifty local NGOs involved in democracy and justice sector related activities which resulted in the formation of a "Coalition of NGOs promoting Democracy and Justice".

On November 14, 1996, this coalition presented to the GOE National Congress a document on justice and democracy which includes a series of requests, suggestions, and policy proposals for the GOE to consider for implementation.

One of the document's section relates exclusively to "equal opportunities for the disabled" and details a series of key actions that must be taken into consideration by the GOE to improve the situation of these groups. For the writing of this specific proposal, CLD invited the local NGO Ecuadorian General Foundation, which has a long history in this country in working with and for individuals and groups with disabilities. CLD plans to continue coordinating the work of this Coalition in order to promote within new GOE administration to assume office in August, 1998, the implementation of the recommendations contained in the justice and democracy document.

The GOE Justice Sector Coordinating Unit - ProJusticia - recently approved a small grant to the Ecuadorian General Foundation to reform the existing "Law for the Disabled" that was approved in August, 1992, and to propose new policies for the consideration of the Special Committee in charge of overseeing the implementation of this law. The USAID project coordinator within ProJusticia promoted the approval of this proposal for the disabled. This small grant will be financed by World Bank funds assigned to ProJusticia.

CEPAM, the leading NGO working on women's issues in Quito and Guayaquil, will collect statistics on battered disabled women who seek legal, medical, psychological, and social work services at the Women and Family Comisarias which are the GOE legal offices for dealing with domestic violence. The statistics collected by CEPAM and other organizations working with CEPAM throughout the country will be used by CEPAM to find support opportunities for these people.

CIDES, the leading NGO in Community Mediation will also start collecting statistics on their disabled clients who access mediation and legal services being supported by CIDES in order to deliver these data to other NGOs and organizations working to promote policies and activities benefitting individuals with disabilities.

#### **4. ECUADOR'S SETTING TO DEAL WITH DISABILITIES**

First and foremost, it should be noted that USAID/Ecuador is not aware that the country maintains any kind of explicit legal or other discrimination against individuals with disabilities, although it is widely recognized that a lot more needs to be done in terms of raising awareness, in both the public and the private sectors, about the nature, extent and complexity of the problem and about the need to develop policies and actions to address this serious issue.

Institutionally, the National Council for Disabilities (CONADIS) is the government organization in charge of developing policies and legislation to address the problems of disadvantaged people. It also coordinates education and health activities addressed to prevent and provide treatment for handicapped persons. In the field of labor, it basically maintains data that contains names and skills of handicapped persons but is not directly involved in income generation activities. CONADIS receives financing from the Government of Ecuador and occasionally from private organizations. As stated above, since 1992, Ecuador has a specific legal body, the "Law for the Disabled", that is presently under review by the Ecuadorian General Foundation through an Agreement with ProJusticia.

Other GOE institutions assisting the disabled include: the Ministry of Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and the National Institute for the Child and Family. These GOE entities either directly provide services to the disabled or finance the provision of such services through other public and private organizations. The Ministry of Education, for example, maintains a number of "special education schools" throughout the country that work in the pedagogical needs of children and youth with mental retardation. At this writing it has not been possible to assess, with any degree of reliability, the quality and effectiveness of the Ministry's services or the actual size of the population that is actually covered.

Also important to mention is the fact that Ecuador has many NGOs that are involved in advocating for and providing services to people with disabilities with a wide geographical coverage. The list of NGOs (provided above) that have received SDAA financing for activities aimed at improving the quality of life of the disabled, is only illustrative of the concern that exists outside the public sector for this issue. Most NGOs are devoted to the provision of therapy and education for people with disabilities. FASINARM (Guayaquil) and the Ecuadorian General Foundation (Quito) are the leading NGOs in this area because, in addition to the provision of services, they are concerned and working with policy and legal aspects. The role of the Ecuadorian General Foundation in reviewing legislation for the disabled has already been mentioned. In a parallel fashion, FASINARM has prepared and submitted to the President's Office a 26-page report on the needs of the disabled which seeks GOE attention and specific action on this matter.

In sum, the Mission believes that Ecuador has an environment that is positive and constructive in terms of promoting

and undertaking new policies/ideas/approaches to deal with the problems of the disabled, although public and private sector awareness needs to be emphasized.

## **5. USAID/ECUADOR FUTURE ACTIONS - THE AGENCY'S POLICY PAPER AND ACTION PLAN ON DISABILITIES**

As mentioned above, USAID/Ecuador is a close-out Mission scheduled to terminate development assistance activities in the country by FY 2003. This, coupled with the reality of diminishing program and staff resources, highlights the fact that little new programming can be considered and implemented in the time remaining. However, based on the experiences gathered by this Mission and considering the seriousness, complexity and high incidence of the problems affecting the disabled, USAID/Ecuador proposes to conduct several actions to address this issue, in conformity with the Agency's Policy Paper and Action Plan on Disabilities, as follows:

- ◆ Advocacy. Through ongoing dialogue with the GOE, NGO partners and the donor community, will seek opportunities to present and discuss USAID concerns and policies for the disabled and promote GOE, NGO and donor responses in the areas of policy and services.
- ◆ Health and Family Planning. Most of the Mission's emphasis will be placed on prevention and targeted to the poor, including support for improving prenatal care and reducing high risk pregnancies, which will lower the risk of physical and mental damage to newborns. Also, and although the Mission is not directly involved in highway accident prevention, the GOE/MOH efforts in this area can be encouraged, as Ecuador leads Latin America in highway accident rates, with no doubt significant permanent disabilities resulting therefrom.
- ◆ Health Policy and Legislation. One other area of potential action is through the Center for Responsible Parenthood (CEPAR). CEPAR has an agreement with the Health Commission of the Congress to assist in the preparation of health legislation and provide pertinent information for policy-making. They can review the status of relevant legislation to protect the rights of the disabled and/or promote new initiatives in this area. Secondly, if it turns out that little national data on the extent that disabilities exist, it is possible to consider adding pertinent questions to the 1999 ENDEMAIN Survey.
- ◆ Education and Employment. The Mission will continue to use the SDAA mechanism and its microenterprise assistance program in order to finance activities to provide technical skills training and income generation for individuals and groups that are mentally or physically disabled.
- ◆ Civil Society and Democracy. USAID/Ecuador will continue to emphasize and reinforce actions and plans presently being carried out by partner NGOs such as CLD, CIDES and CEPAM that are intended to improve the policy/legal framework to address the problems of the disabled and to improve the quality of services for them.