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## **New Forward-Thinking Disabilities Assistance Approach**

### **1. Summary and Policy Relevance**

A key objective of USAID/Vietnam’s new Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) is “Expanded Opportunities for Vulnerable Populations,” which contribute to the broader goal of a more inclusive Vietnam. The Mission aims to address key challenges for persons with disabilities (PWDs) through provision of direct assistance to improve health, independence, and participation in economic and social life. Support for disability advocacy, policy, and systems strengthening will complement and sustain such assistance. In particular, the soon-to-be ratified Convention of the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD) will necessitate strengthened data monitoring and outreach on guiding principles in order to influence sector-specific service provision. A conceptual new program could particularly focus on improving physical, occupational, and speech therapies (POS) for PWDs to enable them to better manage daily life activities and functions, and open up opportunities for education and employment.

As part of the U.S. Government's broader assistance program in Vietnam, USAID has been working to help Vietnamese persons with disabilities, regardless of cause, and that policy is not expected to change. The envisioned program could involve a mix of implementing instruments, and would prioritize local implementing partners.

### **2. Background and Relation to New Design**

Looking back at the history of USAID assistance in this sector, in 1989, when Vietnam was still a low-income country and received little international aid and civil society was non-existent, programs provided needed short-term direct support such as wheelchairs and prosthetics for elevating a severely disadvantaged population. This period is still seen by a range of stakeholders as a time of important efforts to remedy urgent situations while also improving USG relations with Vietnam. Twenty-five years of USAID support in this sector has helped bring about key outcomes in services, disability policy, and legislation in Vietnam, including the Government of Vietnam’s (GVN) enactment of the 2010 Vietnam National Disabilities Law and the formation of the National Coordinating Committee on Disability (NCCD).

Direct assistance was later complemented with rehabilitation and training for service providers so that devices would be properly delivered and used. This was followed by livelihoods, job skills training/education, and legal reforms to ensure dedicated services and disability rights would be protected. To address discrimination and bias against PWDs, USAID supported associations and organizations to better advocate for issues of importance to PWDs. To support economic inclusion, USAID assisted the formation of the Blue Ribbon Employer Council, a public-private partnership to provide employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the private sector.

### **3. Planned Design of Activities**

At the core of the new CDCS is an emphasis on inclusion – broadening economic and social participation, and increasing public participation in policy making. The disabilities program envisioned would be a central component of these plans.

USAID’s disability sector assessments and interviews with key GVN ministry and local officials confirmed that significant challenges remain. Persons with disabilities in Vietnam are currently losing opportunities for improving their independence, social participation, and potential for development. There is largely an absence of POS therapies at district and lower level, where PWDs are most likely to access services. POS therapies are recognized as effective for gaining the independence of persons with disabilities, including their ability to learn and work, thus serving as a gateway to a fuller disability package of services. In rural areas, POS therapies are only provided through access to community-based solutions and care under highly strained government systems, if any. The new program will focus on providing POS therapies for PWDs in selected provinces, and increase proficiency in these areas to ensure services continue after the program ends. A series of consultations have been undertaken by the design team which has involved host government ministries, medical education facilities, and the local NGO community. During the coming year, the GVN is rolling out the National Action Plan on Rehabilitation (NAPR). This is slated to serve as the basis for increasing the intensity and resources for building up quality services in this critical link in the disability service system. In particular, training is at the heart of the NAPR, whether related to pre-employment or specialist and continuing education levels. The envisioned program could ensure that PWDs have access to quality services under the NAPR as supply increases.

USAID intends to continue to foster the enabling environment for disability policies and coordination. In addition, USAID plans to facilitate the enforcement of disability policies and legislation at sub-national levels, as well as advocate for disability rights through self-help and civil society at the commune level.

### **4. Possible Program Components**

1. Deliver POS services to enhance PWDs’ participation in society
  - 1.1. POS therapies essential to improve daily functions, moving, working, and communication
  - 1.2. Support services to families and care providers
  - 1.3. Assistive devices delivery (such as hearing aids, prosthetics, wheelchairs)
  - 1.4. Service information
  - 1.5. Effective referral system to connect with other health, education, and employment services
2. Increase ability to provide quality POS services
  - 2.1. Develop POS training of practitioners and technicians
  - 2.2. Provide essential equipment for POS facilities at district and lower levels
  - 2.3. Advocate policies to increase availability and quality of POS services
3. Foster disability rights policies, advocacy, and coordination
  - 3.1. Support PWD organizations and their representatives (such as parents)
  - 3.2. Promote the development and implementation of provincial action plans on disabilities
  - 3.3. Foster implementation of the CRPD

## 5. Possible Geographic Focus and Scope by Province

Target areas would likely be those where disability prevalence and poverty rates are high. In addition, USAID's future disability program would likely focus on sectors where the GVN has demonstrated ownership over the course of previous interventions. The program may also likely emphasize target groups where early intervention will have the greatest impact.

Although the country has made significant progress in areas such as inclusive education and improving economic opportunity for PWDs, support to the most severely disabled in rural provinces has not been reached. The majority of PWDs (75.7%) and their families live in rural areas where economic, social, and health conditions are severely limited. In rural areas, POS therapy is only provided on an improvised basis through community-based solutions, which has involved care by highly strained government agencies. Rural communities in provinces such as Tay Ninh, Binh Phuoc, Quang Nam, Binh Dinh, Dong Nai, Hue, and Thai Binh could be likely candidates for such assistance. Depending on the current status in each province, the level of investment may vary and may not be standardized across the board. USAID would plan to make adjustments, as appropriate, in response to changing needs.

An envisioned geographic distribution of program components is described below.

### 5.1. Dong Nai (Bien Hoa) and Binh Dinh (Phu Cat):

- **Current Activities:** USAID is currently working in these provinces through the Disability Support Project to build the GVN-implemented case management system to identify needs for persons with disabilities and connect them to services while also developing the provincial government ability to provide sustainable provide direct assistance, including assistive devices, corrective surgeries, and other rehabilitation therapies.
- **Possible New Activities:** From 2015, the new program could continue to work with local governments to further develop the case management system as well as place an emphasis to improve rehabilitation services provided at the district level, including those provided in the district health centers, rehabilitation clinics, commune health centers, schools, and in home-based programs. POS therapists could be trained so that they can provide quality care for disabled persons, while parents and caregivers will also be supported. The assistance would focus on improving the independence of PWDs, as well as their working and learning functions.

### 5.2. Tay Ninh and Quang Nam:

- **Current Activities:**
  - In 2014, USAID will be providing focused support that targets more specific opportunities in these provinces, including strengthening the provincial government's capacity to plan, implement, and monitor disability programs in line with national policy. This will include training on the new community-based rehabilitation and case management circulars, and helping provincial departments update and execute their disability plans of action. It will also include support for software development and training to build a Disability Information System as a key monitoring, reporting, and planning tool.

- The second component will strengthen disabled persons organizations' (DPO) or other self-organized groups' abilities and provincial DPO infrastructure. Assistance will be provided to help nascent DPOs complete the requirements for legal registration and to then implement programs that will serve DPO members, particularly in the areas of employment and livelihood development. This will serve the dual purpose of empowering disabled persons and helping the provinces achieve objectives in their disability action plans.
- **Possible New Program Activities:** From 2015, USAID could support POS service provision at the district or commune level, including upgrading rehabilitation facilities, as well as training of POS specialists. Direct assistance for persons with disabilities might include the provision of therapies (at home and at health or educational facilities), transportation support, assistive devices, and parent/caregiver assistance.

### 5.3. Binh Phuoc, Thai Binh, Thua Thien Hue, and others:

- **Current Activities:** Assistance will start this year with a small grants program, which has reached into other provinces with a high prevalence of disability. Local and international NGOs, local GVN agencies, and businesses will be invited to submit proposals to address the needs of persons with disabilities.
- **New Program Activities:** From 2015, the program may provide longer-term assistance in cooperation with the provincial governments to improve the provision of POS services to persons with disabilities and provide training at the district and commune level.