Globalization and disability inclusion

People with disabilities are the largest, most marginalized and resource-poor social group in the world, and the majority live in rural areas of the Asia Pacific region (WHO and WB 2011). Despite this reality, people with disabilities continue to be invisible within Southeast Asian discourses of poverty, regional integration and theories of development. This chapter examines how the economic integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) into a single regional market – and into global markets, networks of production and trade – intersects with specific forms of disability-based disadvantage in the region. These globalizing and neoliberal economic transformations are characterized by insecurity and material hardship for many workers (Wilton and Schuer 2006, 188). In the global South there is little knowledge of the impacts of these changes, particularly on people with disabilities (Eide and Ingstad 2011). We do know that industrial capitalism and contemporary economies are geared toward an able-body-mind norm, however, and that this has resulted in the systematic exclusion of people with disabilities (Gleeson 1999). Critical geographies must examine how ASEAN economic integration, as an example of globalized and neoliberal regional development, can provide people with disabilities with a living wage, job security, dignity and meaningful social inclusion.

In this paper we argue that new forms of regional and global integration exacerbate pre-existing disability-based inequalities and differences among people with disabilities themselves. Regional integration exposes people with disabilities to new sources of opportunity that they struggle to access, let alone benefit from. The poorest men and women with disabilities, often women, those with sensory, intellectual and complex, multiple impairments are the least likely to secure wage-based employment – including in globalized industries. They are also the most likely to be left in rural villages with minimal support while other household members migrate to work in globalized industries to earn income to support their households financially (Gartrell and Hoban 2015). The establishment of a single ASEAN market may foster economic forms of inclusion and notions of citizenship, but the socio–cultural relations and hierarchical structures of power that shape social lives and often exclude the poor, including those with disabilities, at best continue to be neglected and at worst are magnified. We illustrate our argument by drawing on research in rural Cambodia (see also Gartrell 2010; Gartrell and Hoban 2013; Gartrell and Hoban 2015).
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Background: globalization and regional development

Globalization has brought unprecedented opportunities for cooperation and competition at every scale. But greater integration and increasingly complex networks of trade and production worldwide have not diminished the significance of ‘regions’ at sub-national and transnational scales (Coe et al. 2004). Regionalism has grown rapidly in the last 20 years, with more than 200 trade groupings reported to the World Trade Organization globally, most of these established after 1995 (Plummer 2006). Regional economic blocks aim to strengthen the economic prospects of all member countries and are part of a broader international trend to produce greater economies of scale. In the ASEAN region, numerous moves have been made to promote greater ASEAN intraregional integration and interaction with regional neighbors including the ASEAN Free Trade Area and the ASEAN Economic Community.

In this paper, we use Coe et al.’s definition of regional development as “a dynamic outcome of the complex interaction between territorialized relational networks and global production networks within the context of changing regional governance structures” (2004, 469). This conceptual framework acknowledges regional development as a relational process, with regions as permeable territorial formations informed by what occurs within and beyond their boundaries through relations of markets, competition, control and dependency (Coe et al. 2004, 469). Regions are increasingly shaped by international as well as intra- and inter-regional scale relations and networks. Regional economic development is thus configured by the synergistic and dynamic interaction between these multi-scalar factors and processes.

In the ASEAN region, substantive moves toward greater regional integration followed the Asian Financial Crisis (AFC). The crisis highlighted the region’s vulnerability to external economic and political forces as well as the need to promote Southeast Asian countries economic cooperation and recovery (Anwar et al. 2009). Within ASEAN there were fears that global trends toward regionalism could have negative effects on ASEAN (Plummer 2006) and progress toward an ASEAN economic community hastened. Since this time the ‘Asian Way’ to problem-solving and development gained traction, and greater integration into global supply chains has gathered pace.

The AFC prompted the adoption of expanded neoliberal reforms (Springer 2009). Neoliberal reform concentrates on three main areas: free trade on goods and services, the free circulation of capital and freedom of investment (Power 2003). To date, neoliberal economic reform in Southeast Asia has reinforced the socio-political status quo where a small elite have consolidated their wealth and privilege whilst the benefits for lower classes have not materialized (Springer 2009; Lilja 2013). This has particularly been the case in post-transitional Cambodia. Neoliberal economic reform has facilitated rising inequality (Springer 2009; Harvey 2005). Critical research can illuminate the globalized politics of neoliberal reform, which often (re)produces the deprivation, disadvantage and poverty that underpin the production of normative body-mind differences. These differences are the grounds on which disability as an embodied social-spatial process of discrimination is produced (Gartrell et al. 2016; Soldatic 2013). Our conceptual and analytical lens must incorporate the production of impairment for poverty reduction and inclusive development strategies to be effective.

An ASEAN economic community: dynamic growth, deprivation and inequality

In December 2015, the ten ASEAN member countries (Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Brunei, The Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar) officially linked as an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) (ASEAN 2014; Reuters/AFP 2015). ASEAN sees the
potential of an ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) to further boost the region’s dynamic
growth through gains in trade and investment, expanding consumer markets, spreading
networks of infrastructure and trade connections, and a workforce of 300 million (ADB and ILO
2014). The AEC will institute a range of neoliberal reforms including the freer flow of goods,
services, labor, investment and capital, reduced internal trade barriers amongst ASEAN mem-
bers, the promotion of members as sites for investment and trade partnerships, and strength-
ened institutions (ADB and ILO 2014; El Achkar Hilal 2014). These regional level changes,
particularly the reduction in intra-regional transaction costs, will enable ASEAN to promote
the region to multi-national corporations as a vertically integrated market (Plummer 2006,
438–439). Although ASEAN member nations are closely integrated with international markets
through current trade and multinational networks (Plummer 2006), improved integration into
global supply chains is a policy focus and ongoing goal of ASEAN member governments (El
Achkar Hilal 2014).

The AEC aims to achieve development with equity alongside greater global integration (El
Achkar Hilal 2014). Whilst many agree that equitable and inclusive development is of particular
importance in ASEAN (ADB and ILO 2014; El Achkar Hilal 2014; Zhuang and Ali 2010), its
achievement will be a key challenge. Inclusion itself is poorly defined in ASEAN development
discourse and tends to refer to spatial and not social inclusion – let alone disability inclusion
(Zhuang and Ali 2010). Furthermore, ASEAN is very diverse with “dynamic Asian economies”
that range from less-developed to middle-income countries (Plummer 2006, 438). The 620
million people in the region also have very different education levels, employment productivity
and live in diverse political and economic environments. Workers in Thailand, for example, are
four times more ‘productive’ than those in Cambodia, and literacy rates in Cambodia and Laos
are less than 75 percent while other nations have much higher rates (ADB and ILO 2014). Such
diversity will adversely affect the speed and feasibility of collective efforts to achieve full integra-
tion that is inclusive of all members let alone social groups in individual member nations.

In addition to being a dynamic region with some of the world’s fastest growing economies,
the Asia Pacific is home to the largest number of extremely poor people (Balakrishnan et al.
2013), including 400 million or two-thirds of people with disabilities worldwide (Edmonds
2005). Inequality across the region is rising and ubiquitous, and most evident in Cambodia
(Zhuang and Ali 2010). The gap between rich and poor has expanded in terms of income and
across a range of measures including underweight children, lack of access to sanitation, lack of
access to safe drinking water and deaths of children under 5 years of age (ADB 2013). Hun-
ger remains a challenge in most countries with nearly 26 percent of children under 5 being
underweight (Brooks et al. 2014). These deprivations in basic healthcare, sanitation and nutri-
tion greatly contribute to the production of impairments. While almost universal enrollment
in primary education has been achieved in most ASEAN nations, nearly 3 million children of
primary school age are not in school – having never enrolled or dropped out early (El Achkar
Hilal 2014, 55). It is likely that girls and boys with disabilities are among these. Although pov-
terty headcounts have been dropping annually they are still relatively high, and those who have
emerged out of poverty face the constant risk of falling back into poverty (WB 2014). Inequality
poses a significant challenge to sustainable and equitable development, and as Zhuang and Ali
(2010) put it, there is a “suffering” side to the “shinning” face of Asia’s rapid economic growth
because not everyone has benefit.

Employment opportunities are projected to increase with ASEAN economic integration. In
terms of occupational demand, the greatest growth is projected in unskilled and semi-skilled
occupations associated with the informal sector: agricultural, forestry and fishery laborers, street
and market sales people, mining and construction workers (El Achkar Hilal 2014). Growth in
vulnerable and informal sector employment is a concern as many workers are already trapped in poor quality jobs where they earn too little to escape poverty.¹ There is a high risk of exploitation and entrenched poverty in the absence of decent work opportunities, weak commitments to labor standards, social protection and safety nets in ASEAN. ASEAN economic integration may well add to the current lack of decent employment, particularly for women and young people (ADB and ILO 2014), thus increasing inequality (El Achkar Hilal 2014). Indeed, more critical analysis of the impact of the regional integration on the poorest people in ASEAN nations, young men and women with disabilities, is urgently required.

Disability-based inequality in ASEAN

Disability is an axis along which multiple compound disadvantages and discriminations stick, and there is widespread recognition of the intractable links between disability and poverty worldwide and in ASEAN nations (UNESCAP 2012; WHO and WB 2011; Palmer 2011; Gar- trell 2010; Graham et al. 2014; Ngo et al. 2013). Challenges faced by people with disabilities are pervasive and deep-rooted in negative stereotypes that result in discrimination. As a consequence, people with disabilities have poorer access to education, employment, healthcare and transport than their able-bodied counterparts (UNESCAP 2012; WHO and WB 2011). These inequalities are compounded by violations of dignity through violence, abuse and prejudice, and denial of their autonomy; women and girls with disabilities, especially those with sensory, intellectual and developmental impairments, are particularly vulnerable.

In the ASEAN region, disability-based discrimination is rooted in negative cultural attitudes and social stereotypes. In Malaysia, for example, people with disabilities are seen as “sick, not normal, and without abilities,” and hence constantly need help (Islam 2015, 172). Parents in Thai society often refuse to have their children with disabilities exposed to community activities because they fear their children might become targets of pity, if not mockery, from others (Naemiratch and Manderson 2009; UNESCAP 2012). Across the Theravada Buddhist nations of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar disability is understood to be a deserved consequence of bad actions or karma from a previous life, including unpleasant attitudes toward people with disabilities (Naemiratch and Manderson 2009). In Cambodia, mental disabilities are thought to be curses from spiritual beings; therefore, patronizing and belittling stigmas are common (Connelly 2009; AusAID 2012) and treatment is not usually sought (Kalyanpur 2011). Derogatory terminology is used to refer to people with disabilities as “inferior, weak, stupid, or all of the above” (Connelly 2009, 127). Family members with a disability are often perceived to be a disgrace to the family (UNESCAP 2012), objects to be pitied and hidden at home (Gartrell and Hoban 2015). These cultural beliefs and attitudes underpin low social status and the institutionalized barriers people with disabilities face to socio-economic and political inclusion, including the denial of legal protection.

Institutionalized discrimination

The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) gives unprecedented recognition of the human rights of people with disabilities and provides a political and legislative framework to address the disability-poverty link (Eide and Ingstad 2011, 2). There are significant gaps between the domestic laws of Asian nations and international law as reflected in the region’s often non-existent implementation of the CRPD, (Perlin 2012). No comprehensive disability law mandates principles of non-discrimination in many Asian countries, and few nations have well-documented or extensive experience in the operation
of disability discrimination legislation (ibid:13). Of all ASEAN nations, only the Philippines reported to the UNESCAP that they have anti-discrimination laws, and few nations actually define what constitutes discrimination. Furthermore, within ASEAN only Malaysia and Thailand define disability from a social model perspective in alignment with the CRPD (ibid:14).

Cambodia does not have a national definition of disability. The draft Law on the Protection and the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities included a definition derived from the conceptual framework outlined in the CRPD (Connelly 2009). However, when the Law was promulgated in 2009, it adopted the following definition of disability:

Any persons who lack, lose, or damage any physical or mental functions, which result in a disturbance to their daily life or activities, such as physical, visual, hearing, intellectual impairments, mental disorders and any other types of disabilities toward the insurmountable end of the scale.

(RGC 2009)

This definition of disability conflates and normalizes impairment (body-mind difference) with restricted activities without explicit identification of the social and environmental dimensions that interact with an impairment to preclude participation and produce disability. In practice, the Cambodian government defines disability in relation to eight “vague” conditions: difficulties in seeing, hearing, speaking, moving, feeling, behaving, learning and staying fit (Connelly 2009, 137). Other Asian nations, such as China, continue to define disability as “abnormality” and use medical approaches that attribute disability to impairment in clear violation of the CRPD’s social model approach (Perlin 2012, 13). The lack of an internationally agreed upon definition of disability (WHO and WB 2011), together with a weak and inconsistent understanding of disability, poses problems for the measurement of disability prevalence and the development of strategies to address disability-specific disadvantages.

In Cambodia, for example, disability statistics are “notoriously unreliable or frustratingly incomplete” (Zook 2010, 151) and differ significantly depending upon the sources (Kalyanpur 2011). The Cambodia Socio-Economic Survey in 2004 estimated disability prevalence to be just under 5 percent; the Ministry of Social Affairs in 2008 reported 4 percent and the National Census in 2009 reported 1.5 percent (Lindsay 2009). Some estimates go as high as 15 percent, while the United Nations once reported that 30 percent of Cambodian families have at least one person with disability (Zook 2010; AusAID 2012). The most up-to-date Cambodian Demographic and Health Survey (NIS et al. 2015) stated that 10 percent of people at the age of 5 and older have one kind of disability or more.2 The immediate implication of inconsistent and vague definitions of disability are inaccurate data collection, which typically results in the underestimation of the number of people with impairments in the global South (Meekosha 2011). This renders disability invisible in official statistics, political dialogue and social policy (Gartrell et al. 2016). In this context, the implementation of disability laws and regulations is difficult, irrespective of entrenched socio-cultural attitudes.

Despite all ten ASEAN nations being signatories to the UN CRPD, they do not comply with the Articles of the CRPD and are not taking steps to create enabling environments through the provision of explicit and targeted support for people with disabilities. Even in ASEAN nations that have domestic disability laws, such as Cambodia, there is no course of action that would allow a person with a disability to file a claim or resolve a grievance (Perlin 2012, 15). The Asia and the Pacific is the only region in the world that does not have a regional human rights court or commission and its absence is a major impediment to the movement to enforce disability rights in Asia (Perlin 2012). The lack of a regional level redress mechanism and rights tribunal is
typically justified by the supposed conflict between ‘‘Asian Values’’ and universal human rights. Asian nations also argue that economic rights are prioritized over political rights because at different stages of development it is necessary to focus on different rights (ibid:17). Furthermore, ASEAN nations lack the political, economic and social foundations and institutions necessary to sustain a commitment to human rights culture (Narine 2012). These cultural and institutional barriers to progress toward rights-based economic and social development, including disability rights, are amplified by neoliberal reforms that further undermine social democratic concerns for equality, democracy, social solidarity and accountability (Springer 2009).

Cambodia’s neoliberalist reform

Cambodia has undergone rapid socio-economic transformation since the institution of a liberal democratic/free market economy in the early 1990s (Springer 2009). Cambodia has transitioned from nearly three decades of civil war, impoverishment and instability to a rapidly growing economy tightly integrated into regional and global markets, networks of trade and production (Hughes and Un 2011). Mirroring ASEAN trends, Cambodia’s economic growth has been impressive, but inequality has significantly increased (RGC 2014; WB 2014; ILO/NIS 2010, 11). Poverty has decreased from 53 percent in 2004 to 20 percent in 2013. In line with regional trends, however, many are just above the poverty line and vulnerable to falling back into poverty (WB 2014).

The most recent Cambodian Government national development blueprint – The Rectangular Strategy – identified the attraction of more domestic and foreign investment, greater regional and global integration, increased and expanded exports and export markets as a strategy to address the anticipated budget shortfall as development assistance diminishes (RGC 2013). There is substantial potential for growth in these areas through Cambodia’s active role in ASEAN (AusAID 2012). However, the relationship between the AEC and the labor market will determine the potential impacts of regional integration (ADB and ILO 2014). At the regional scale Cambodia’s role is labor supply. Cheap, unskilled labor is one of the few comparative advantages the Cambodian government can offer to foreign investors (Lilja 2013).

Labor migration and disability

Findings from ongoing research in Cambodia suggest that people with disabilities encounter physical and attitudinal barriers to wage-based employment, particularly in globalized garment factories in Phnom Penh and/or Thailand. Men and women with disabilities who are able to move and communicate independently have migrated and gained employed in garment and other factories. However, those who require support to move and travel are less likely to be able to negotiate access to household level resources to support them to seek such employment. Without household level emotional, practical and financial support it is very difficult – if not impossible – for a member with a disability to actively seek employment beyond their village, particularly if they do not earn their own income. Men and women with disabilities that require communication or mobility support from others are thus effectively excluded from access to new and emerging forms of wage-based employment and remain engaged in poorly paid informal sector work at the village level, if they earn an income at all.

If those with mild impairments or impairments that can be hidden do manage to get employed, they usually find themselves disadvantaged at their workplaces (NIS et al. 2015; Connelly 2009; RGC 2010a). They have a higher chance of losing their jobs because of discrimination and common (mis)perceptions that people with disabilities are unproductive and
unable to do anything (Gartrell 2010). This is even though they often “have appropriate skills, strong loyalty and low rates of absenteeism” (WHO and WB 2011, 236). When non-disabled household members migrate for employment to financially support their village-based household, those with disabilities are often left at home with less available care and support. Although grandparents, siblings and other relatives may provide some assistance, people with disabilities can experience even greater difficulties in their daily lives. The household has lost the daily physical presence of the member who is likely in their productive prime and most able to attend to a member with disability.

Employers in garment factories and in the construction industry often reject potential employees with disabilities because they believe they are unable to perform required work tasks. Employers have informed wheelchair users that it is not safe to employ them in a factory because the physical space is cramped and potentially dangerous, particularly in the event of a fire. Employers are concerned that if they employ someone with a vision impairment, they may not be able to find the toilet and/or get lost on the way back to their work space. Employers also fear being unable to instruct men and women with hearing impairments on their work tasks. Employers are concerned they would be looked upon poorly if they employ people with disabilities as such action would be seen to create difficulties for the person with disability themselves and thus be unsupportive of them. The better course of action would be to care for and protect people with disabilities at home and, by doing so, remove any potential difficulties they may face if they were to work (Gartrell and Hoban 2013).

In Cambodia, as is the case across ASEAN nations, people with disabilities have poor educational attainment, which restricts them to unskilled and low-skilled segments of the labor market. Rates of school enrollment of children with disabilities are half of that of non-disabled children, which in the long term means they are less competitive as employees (Kalyanpur 2011). Parents can be reticent to send their children with disabilities to schools that are not disability-friendly either socially or pedagogically; they typically lack appropriately skilled staff and relevant materials to support children with disabilities to learn. A lack of education undermines economic participation and greatly contributes to the economic marginalization of men and women with and without disabilities alike (AusAID 2012; Connelly 2009; NIS et al. 2015). In education and employment, there is lack of understanding that the provision of appropriate supports for people with disabilities can ensure their positive and valuable contribution. In their absence, entrenched patterns of disadvantage can result in inter-generational poverty (UNESCAP 2012).

Cambodia as a regional supplier of cheap, unskilled labor

At the regional level there is no research that examines the impact of disability on international migration. But current evidence suggests that if people with disabilities are able to migrate for work alongside increasingly large numbers of short-term migrants, they are likely to be employed at the lowest level and face significant risks to their health, safety and well-being. Within the region, Cambodia is a relatively large net-exporter of low-skilled labor migrants and the International Organisation of Migration estimate that by 2018 the number of Cambodian migrants to Thailand may reach 316,000 (Maltoni 2010). The majority of these migrants work in agriculture, construction and fisheries (Paitoonpong 2011; Chan 2009) and are irregular migrants (ILO 2006). Labor migration is part of the Cambodian Government’s employment generation strategy (RGC 2010b), as the economy cannot absorb the 250,000 new workers added to the economy each year (Heng 2013). With widespread poverty, low market access and environmental degradation, migrants themselves look at migration to Thailand as a “livelihood
strategy” that averts poverty through greater employment opportunities and higher wages (Meyer et al. 2014, 200; CDRI 2007).

Domestic factors in Thailand also drive the growing numbers of Cambodian migrants. Thailand’s declining fertility rate alongside the increasing number of senior citizens has meant a shrinking working population and higher dependency ratio (Chalamwong 2008). At the same time, basic educational requirements have gone from a minimum of nine to 12 years. This means fewer low-educated and hence fewer low-skilled workers – especially for three D jobs (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) – which in turn produces higher demand from abroad. The Thai government has requested low-skilled labor from Laos and Cambodia, but expensive, time-consuming and complicated official migration procedures resulted in a short-fall (Chantavanich 2008). Thailand has therefore “opted to employ illegal” migrant workers from Cambodia, and tolerance of their illegality will encourage greater inflows in the future (Heng 2013, 97). The majority of Cambodians who migrate to Thailand are thus irregular migrants who are exposed to the mental and physical risks associated with the daily fear of capture and expulsion (Zimmerman et al. 2011; ILO 2006). Discrimination, harassment, violence, communication barriers, underpay and restriction of all sorts are far from being uncommon. But worse – on top of their usually low literacy and education (ILO 2005) – their irregular status discourages them from seeking help and accessing protective services (Heng 2013).

In general, the poor and poorest in Cambodia are most likely to migrate for work and remittances reduce the “level, depth and severity of poverty” at home (Tong 2010 cited in Heng 2013, 101). Tong asserts that remittances from international migration have a greater impact on the living standards of migrants and their families than from internal migration. Remittances earned domestically are mostly used, in a prioritized order, for food, debt payment, medical treatment, agriculture, schooling, home improvements, savings and consumer goods (Dahlberg 2005, 6). Whilst Cambodian migrants to Thailand can improve the visible status of their household through such consumption, it has a negative impact on young people’s education as they are drawn to migrate and earn money rather than continue their studies (Heng 2013). Disincentives for young people to continue at school will have long-term implications for the Cambodian labor market, particularly the supply of semi-skilled and skilled labor.

When and if men and women with disabilities do secure employment in Thailand, dangerous work exposes men and women with (and without) disabilities to injury and accidents, and little compensation is ever made. If an accident does occur, workers can be left with lifelong disabilities that fundamentally undermine their employability; this impacts the entire household. When a family member acquires a disability, others are bound to provide some sort of care, at least for a short term. Caregivers are therefore unable to engage in paid work as they may have previously, which has multiple negative impacts on the household. Furthermore, young unmarried women with disabilities who migrate live away from family and are vulnerable to rape and sexual violence; they have poor knowledge of how to protect their sexual and reproductive health and are inexperienced in negotiating relationships with men. Whilst employment in such contexts does provide an income, it is accompanied by significant risks that have long-term impacts across the life cycle. Current migration patterns, the demand for and supply of low-skilled laborers may well not serve Cambodia’s longer-term development aspirations for equitable and inclusive growth.

Conclusion

Despite ASEAN member countries being signatories to the UN CRPD and committed to inclusive growth, at the national and ASEAN regional level legal, institutional and administrative absences undermine disability rights protection and inclusive development. ASEAN has
indicated the desire to protect vulnerable groups – including women, children, people with disabilities and migrant workers – and to achieve democracy in the region. However, the political and institutional development needed to ensure employment rights and protections for the most vulnerable are absent. The achievement of equitable, socially and spatially inclusive growth also requires further critical examination of neoliberal reform agendas.

The first step to ensure the visibility of disability in national statistics, political discourse and social policy, as well as in a regional human rights commission, is the adoption of a regionally agreed upon definition of disability based upon the social model. Limited understanding of disability and employment rights, non-discrimination and equal opportunity continue to result in multiple disability-specific barriers to employment. The physical barriers involved with traveling in inaccessible environments together with socio-cultural attitudes to migration and employment means that men and women with disabilities are often locked in feminized, domestic home spaces (Gartrell and Hoban 2015). Working age Cambodian men and women with disabilities are thus more likely to be unemployed, working in low status, poorly paid and informal sector work than their abled-bodied counterparts (Gartrell 2010). Improved enrollment in primary school, retention in secondary and high school, and clear pathways from high school to tertiary education/vocational training are key prerequisites to improve the skill level of the workforce and access to decent, skilled employment. ASEAN and individual member states need to adopt specific policies and strategies to support employers to provide enabling environments for employees with disabilities, and to provide inclusive learning environments in schools, higher education institutions and in vocation training.

Neoliberal conceptions of development increasingly underpin globalization and development (Norman 2011). While neoliberal marketization creates new opportunities for economic advancement for some, inequality and exclusion is created for others. Villages are seasonally de-populated as those in their productive prime migrate in the dry season and leave the elderly, children and those with disabilities at home. The very poorest are increasingly marginalized: too poor and without appropriate financial, practical and emotional support to migrate and access more lucrative forms of employment. They are trapped in poverty and poorly paid informal sector work.

Although the Cambodian Government has identified that access to secure work remains the most viable strategy for poverty reduction (NIS et al. 2015), specific strategies and supports are required to achieve disability inclusion and equity both within ASEAN nations and at the regional level. The key development challenge for ASEAN is to sustain growth whilst reducing poverty and inequality and ensuring all enjoy the benefits of economic growth (ILO/NIS 2010, 11). But the ASEAN economic community is further embedding neoliberal economic changes and inequality across the region. For the ASEAN economic community to achieve both increased economic and social prosperity, stronger commitment to labor standards, social protection and the expansion of decent work opportunities is needed. A continued singular economistic focus on intra-regional trade and investment will not achieve disability inclusion and other ASEAN social objectives.

Notes

1 At present approximately three in five (179 million) workers are trapped in vulnerable employment and 92 million earn too little to escape poverty (ILO and ADB 2014).
2 The Cambodia Demographic and Health Survey (NIS, DGH and ICF International 2015) disaggregated disability data based on types: 5 percent with difficulties seeing, 4 percent walking or climbing stairs,
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4 percent remembering and concentrating, 3 percent hearing, 2 percent communicating, and 1 percent self-care.
3 Thailand is the largest importer of Cambodian labor migrants in ASEAN; Malaysia, South Korea and Japan are other popular destinations (Heng 2013).

References


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