

## **Efforts on Collaborating with Local Communities in ASEAN Countries to Support Persons with Developmental Disorders**

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An overview of the research titled "Current Status and Issues of Healthcare Policies for Persons with Developmental Disorders in Southeast Asia" which started in December 2021, was introduced in newsletter No. 73 issued in July 2022.

Following that, a conference was held in Indonesia in August 2022 with the participation of government officials, members of disability organizations, and researchers from both countries. This conference aims to exchange information on efforts and issues related to support on developmental disorders and to discuss future collaboration.

Currently we are conducting literature reviews and interviews focusing on three particularly populous ASEAN member countries: Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. In this article, we will introduce several points we have identified through this process that prompt consideration about Japan's initiatives.

### **I. Advantages of unifying “developmental disorders” as one group**

Based on Japan's Act on Support for Persons with Development Disabilities, developmental disorders are defined as brain dysfunction that is generally expressed during earlier age such as autism, learning disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc. This scope is unique when viewed from an international perspective since many countries have only mentioned autism in their legal systems. During our visits, we asked local communities about their perspectives on this matter.

The response we received from various perspectives was that "rather than basing activism solely on one type of disorder (autism), it is better to categorize all types of disabilities that require appropriate understanding and consideration from the educational stage onwards into one group, in order to increase society's understanding."

## **II. Prevalence Issue of Persons with Developmental Disorders**

Japan has made some efforts to determine the number of individuals with developmental disorders through surveys such as the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare's "Survey on the Difficulty of Living" and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology's "Survey on Students Requiring Special Educational Support in Regular Classes." However, there are still challenges in accurately grasping the “numbers” that represent the actual situation.

The United Nations recognizes that in various countries there are prejudices against disabilities and some individuals cannot access medical diagnoses, so they are developing easily answerable methods (short sets of questions) based on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) for surveys. Indonesia and the Philippines are using ICT to determine the "numbers" while referring to such movements. Japan should also consider using that as references.

## **III. Support for Post-adulthood**

In any of the countries—Indonesia, the Philippines, or Vietnam—have started some efforts raising the awareness and providing education for developmental disorders during childhood period. During the conference held in Indonesia in August 2022 (see figure), many participants expressed that there has also been increasing interest among families (parents and siblings) of individuals with developmental disorders in "employment support" and "securing housing such as group homes, and training for caregivers" for post-adulthood.

The underlined part in Article 24 about "research and survey", which stated that "The government shall endeavor to understand the actual situation of persons with developmental disabilities, taking into account gender, age, and other aspects..." was added in the amendment of Japan's Act on Support for Persons with Development Disabilities in 2016 to clarify that the focus should also be placed during the elderhood.

Addressing support for post-adulthood is an ongoing challenge that Japan must work on to establish a supportive framework. We think we can engage in various trials and errors together with individuals from ASEAN countries in tackling this issue.

(Figure) Indonesia – Japan Roundtable Discussion on Developmental Disorders (August 2, 2020)