

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Policies and Status of People with Disabilities in Oman

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ABSTRACT

The need for regulating and managing the activities of people with disabilities requires clear and effective policy measures that guarantee the rights and protect the interests of this group of people. Developed and developing countries alike designed and introduced various forms of policy measures and procedures to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, but the implementation and development of these measures appear to be considerably weak and slow in most developing countries, where most people with disabilities are deprived of their basic rights. This argument is validated through a comprehensive investigation of the current policies, procedures, and programmes that support people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs. The perceptions of people with disability toward the current procedures and policies in terms of empowering them in various entrepreneurial aspects are assessed through focused group discussions with government officials at the Directorate General for Disabled Affairs, Ministry of Social Development, and disabled entrepreneurs who are categorized as self-employed in the Sultanate of Oman. The results reveal that disabled entrepreneurs consider the current entrepreneurial policies as fragmented and ineffective, hence urging the government to modify the current policies to meet the requirements of people with disability in establishing and running their own enterprises.

Keywords: People with disabilities, disability policy, disabled entrepreneur, entrepreneurial activities.

INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities need clear and structured policies that categorize and fulfill their requirements in the entrepreneurial domain [1], [2]. The concepts and principles of policies designed specifically for people with disabilities are well explained in the United Nations Convention on Right of People with Disability and policy documents and reports of most developed countries. However, policy documents show variation in the definitions and types of disability, with many developing countries lacking coherent policy approaches to deal with people with disabilities. This is apparent in the considerable challenges facing disabled people when establishing and running their own businesses.

Thus, this study aims to investigate the policies, procedures, and training programmes introduced to support disabled people to become self-employed and the extent to which these policies are perceived by disabled entrepreneurs. It is also important to examine and determine the various types of economic activities that disabled entrepreneurs tend to exercise depending on their geographical region and types of disability. The study also aims to explore the main

criteria required in establishing a comprehensive database that could help policy makers to specifically design and implement policies tailored for disabled entrepreneurs.

The analysis presented in this paper is based on focused group discussions with both officials at the Directorate General for Disabled Affairs in the Ministry of Social Development and a group of disabled entrepreneurs in Oman. Discussions focused on policies, strategies, training and awareness programmes related to people with disabilities, as well as the availability of a database for people with disabilities and the incentives offered by the ministry and potential plans for empowering disabled persons in Oman. The analysis is also based on the examination and interpretation of official government documents on disability policies published by the ministry. The findings of this study are expected to improve our understanding and increase awareness of the importance of entrepreneurial policies, procedures, and training programmes in encouraging disabled people to become self-employed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Surveying literature on disability shows that the United Nations and the most developed countries have paid considerable attention to the rights of people with disabilities in terms of access to healthcare, education, employment, and social security. Literature also indicates that many international experiences can help in designing policies aimed at empowering and encouraging people with disability to become self-employed.

Global Perspectives on Empowering People with Disabilities

The United Nations Convention on Right of People with Disability provides a comprehensive approach to disability and defines states' obligation to enacting the law prohibiting discrimination against people with disability. [3] reviewed the experience of 193 countries in terms of their engagement with disability related employment law. The authors showed discrimination against people with disabilities in the employment areas could be in form of hiring and recruitment, vocational training, promotion, remuneration, termination, harassment and indirect discrimination. They found that 75% of countries in Europe and 66% of countries in America prohibited employment discrimination against people with disabilities. They also found that Middle East and North African countries are more engaged with rules of discrimination in the employment than East Asia and Pacific. With regards to entrepreneurial policy, people with disabilities deserve special attention from national and international institutions to ensure that their rights are fully protected. [4] investigated the principles of legal protection for people with disabilities as many of them face some forms of discrimination in treatment. They observed that the purpose behind issuing human rights is achieving social welfare and that the rights of people with disabilities are equal in raising the level of well-being, quality of life, survival, and being more independent.

In the United States, huge efforts were made to empowering people with disabilities to be entrepreneurs. The cooperation between the Office of Disability Employment Policy and the US Department of Labor is considered a great example of empowering people with disabilities to be entrepreneurs. The effort of the two institutions was to design a programme for disabled entrepreneurs with the purpose of removing the barriers and challenges faced by them and encouraging them to be economically self-sufficient. The initiative was implemented at the University of Illinois in Chicago, which offered a course on developing a business plan that covered many topics, starting with product and service offerings, product and service

markets, competition, marketing and sales plans, the operation of the business, the structure of management, business development, and business finance. After completing the course, the participants are supposed to submit a business plan to Chicago Add Us In, and it will be reviewed by specialists before being granted funding for promising plans. The assistance extends to providing technical assistance and assistance from a business incubator [5].

Further initiatives included the entrepreneurship programme offered by the National Center for Disability Entrepreneurship to assist disabled people to realize their personal genius, manage relationships in business, design a canvas model and a Gantt chart, learn accounting and insurance, the ethics of business, marketing, and sales [6]. Coleman Foundation offered entrepreneurship programmes to help disabled people to be self-developed and independent, while Young Entrepreneurs Program focused on assisting them to start and run small businesses. The main feature of US experience with empowering people with disabilities as entrepreneurs exemplifies in making them aware of how to design a business plan and then giving them financial resources to implement their plans.

In the European Union, entrepreneurship is considered an important tool in achieving sustainable economic growth. For example, Technische Universität Dortmund University financed a project on teaching entrepreneurship to people with disabilities. [7] investigated how, what, whom, and where to teach entrepreneurship in European countries. Other scholars found that integrating practical projects with entrepreneurship subjects is the best way to teach entrepreneurship [8], [7]. Further studies summarized teaching entrepreneurship in six topics: time management, self-motivation, idea development, taking responsibility, funding possibilities, and business plan development. They also stressed the importance of skills such as the ability to manage assets, the ability to be productive, the ability to manage network relationships, the ability to identify SWOT, the ability to hire suitable candidates, train employees, and focus on customers' needs and new trends [9], [10]. [7] argued that the Inclusive Entrepreneurial Education with Persons with Disabilities programme could be implemented globally. The creation of a program would be dependent on the needs and demands of participants, which could be in the form of soft and hard skills in entrepreneurship. The framework of IEEPD consists of roles (attitude toward IEEPD), norms (social standards), structure (path of education and funding scheme), and functions (approaches and business models). The main advantage of European countries' experiences toward empowering people with disability focused on many aspects include roles, norms, structure and business model beside teaching and developing entrepreneurial skills.

In Australia, the "Social Ecological Model of Disability Entrepreneurs" proved to be a successful model to train disabled entrepreneurs. This model contained five levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, organizational, community, and sociopolitical [11]. The intrapersonal level refers to individual support needs, personal confidence, and demographics. On the other hand, interpersonal communication highlighted the importance of using advanced and assistive technology to help people with all types of disabilities communicate easily. The organizational level centered on the culture of disability and attitudes at the workplace, inclusive training, and communication services. Community level refers to the type of disability in society, the attitudes of the community toward disability, and the participation of disabled people in social events. The last level focused on public policy, which focused on policies and laws launched toward PWD. The experience of Australia in

empowering disabled entrepreneurs was very attractive and distinctive because the model gives a brief overview of the overall status of people with disabilities at the social, organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels and the policies taken to empower them.

In the developing world, Bangladesh committed to The United Nations Convention on Right of People with Disability in 2013 to protect the rights of people with disability. The act emphasizes offering support to children with disabilities and their families identifying their needs. [12] investigated to what extent was the act compatible with 18 concepts of disability policy imposed by [13]. Five committees were established for Rights and Protection of People with Disability in Bangladesh, which are National Coordination Committee (responsible for organizing all initiatives related people with disability and offering advices to governments to integrate the law with The United Nations Convention on Right of People with Disability), the National Executives Committee (responsible for implementing the decision taken by Coordination Committee), Distract Committee (responsible for implementing the initiatives taken by Coordination Committee), Upazilla Committee (responsible for monitoring and implementing disability program issued by the government) and Town Committee (responsible to oversee the disability programs implemented by the government). However, the result shows that the act requires embracing more concepts such as confidentiality and autonomy and focusing more on integration of the family with initiatives related to people with disabilities. Moreover, the finding indicates that there is a need to increase the level of budgets as well as a team to administer the progress of policy initiatives.

Type of Business Run, and Incentives Received by People with Disability

The exercised business activities often depend on the needs of the market in the specific area where entrepreneurs decide to run their business. [11] examined the type of business run by disabled entrepreneurs. They found a correlation between the type of business and the disability knowledge to start successful businesses like their own. One of those businesses is user-innovative ideas such as car hand control, support delivery, and traveling space for parking. On the other side, technology opens new business opportunities for disabled entrepreneurs to operate in the market. The business could be in the field of technology, embodied in messaging apps, speech recognition software, wheelchairs, and electronic conveyancing. Almost all disability businesses in Australia have businesses in health care and social assistance, education and training, professional, scientific, and technological services, arts and recreation services, information media, and technology. Inspiration for people with disability to become self-employed could be done through offering various grants to assist them to start up the business. [14] reviewed many funding sources offer to disabled entrepreneurs as grants. The Advantage Illinois Program and the Iowa Able Foundation are examples of the funding sources that target disabled persons with offering loans to establish the business. Assistive Technology Guaranteed Loan is a programme that help disabled entrepreneurs to adopt assistive technology in their business where assistive technology could be in form of Braille Translation, Screen Readers, Voice Recognition Software and TTYs.

Challenges Faced by Disabled Entrepreneurs

People with disabilities face many challenges while running their own businesses. [15] investigated how the challenges faced by disabled people inspired them to succeed in entrepreneurial activities. Using structured interviews with 13 disabled entrepreneurs, they

categorized the challenges in terms of institutional barriers, environmental constraints, constraints on development, social and attitudinal barriers, and personal conditions. [15] suggested various actions to overcome those challenges. In terms of institutional barriers and environmental constraints, using diverse resources could be useful to overcome those challenges, which could be education and training, internet resources and technology, new financing alternatives, assistive technologies, and media exposure. Developing individual motivation could be a solution for social and attitudinal barriers. To overcome personal challenges, developing personal capabilities is a solution.

In Indonesia, [16] conducted a study on the people with disabilities empowerment programme to assist them to produce and market their products, to offer vocational training, and to use social media to promote the product. The challenges related to implementing the programme exemplified changing people's minds toward people with disabilities, limited financial support, and a low reward level. In Sweden, [17] investigated the opportunities and barriers that self-employed people faced and found self-employment an opportunity because of its flexibility in working conditions. They also identified barriers such as rigid regulations, difficulties in establishing relationships with other entrepreneurs, and economic redistribution.

In Australia, [11] concluded that disabled entrepreneurs suffered from a lack of job opportunities, and many of them were unemployed. They identified several challenges facing people with disabilities. The first challenge embodies the suffering of a lack of knowledge related to entrepreneurship education. The second challenge focused on communication, where many people face difficulties in communicating with people with disabilities who are entrepreneurs for the purpose of business activities. The third challenge is government social services, which impose some policies that make entrepreneurial activity a great challenge for people with disabilities. The fourth challenge is culture and attitudes, which mean a lot of discrimination in employment and impeding mobility for people with disabilities. Fifthly, financial support is considered the biggest challenge because there are no investors, investment capital, crowdfunding, or loans to support entrepreneurs with disabilities. The recent statistic showed that people with disability in Australia and western countries are more likely to become entrepreneurs than people without disability. They summarized these challenges in financial constraints, lack of capital, mobility barriers, uncertainty of future, government regulations and the cost of accessing assistive technology.

Finally, the major challenge that most countries face when formulating policies related to people with disabilities is the absence of comprehensive databases. Data and information on people with disabilities are necessary to monitor and implement agreements, set policies to guarantee their rights and duties, and to assess the challenges faced by people with disabilities. Interestingly, the World Health Organization has sought to support countries in collecting reliable data on people with disabilities which are assets in defining the needs and barriers that this segment faces [18]. All these efforts exerted in collecting data on people with disabilities aim to design a programme that serves people with disabilities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This section explains how this study examines and evaluates the perception of people with disability against the policies measures and procedures aimed at empowering them to become

entrepreneurs. It provides descriptive analysis of Oman's experience and other international experiences in implementing entrepreneurial programmes for people with disability. To understand the overall situation, different research tools including focused group discussions and official government documents on disability policies are analyzed to understand the demographic information of people with disability in Oman and explain the existed policies for disabled entrepreneurs. The rationale of using focused group discussion method is to have a deep understanding of the perceptions of people with disabilities against the efforts made by the government to support disabled entrepreneurs.

Research Tools

Two research tools were used in this study. The first is two focused group discussions, one with a group of disabled entrepreneurs who are operating in the business sector, and the second with a group of government officials responsible for people with disabilities at the Directorate General for Disabled Affairs, Ministry of Social Development, Muscat, Oman. These two focused groups were complemented by the second primary source to collect primary data, where a selection of official documents of policies and programmes related people with disability in Oman were discussed and analyzed. These two primary sources were sufficient to achieve the primary objectives of this study.

In order to measure the effectiveness of disability policies, a set of research questions were designed to assess the current policies and procedures related to people with disabilities, training programmes, Oman Vision 2040 for people with disabilities, project areas for disabled entrepreneurs, incentives provided by various institutions to people with disabilities, plans to support entrepreneurs with disabilities, as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: Focus Group Questions

Variables	Questions
Entrepreneurial Policies Related People with Disability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there strategies to support people with disability to become entrepreneurs? 2. Are there specific policies to support disabled entrepreneurs? What are its goals? 3. What are the Ministry's policies for employing people with disabilities? Are they applied or not? 4. What are the policies that guarantee the rights of disabled people in the labor market? 5. What are programmes used to evaluate, follow up and implement policies?
Awareness and Training Programs for Persons with Disabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the Ministry's role in informing disabled people about chances in the market? 2. What are the awareness programmes and campaigns aimed at developing the skills and capabilities of disabled people in entrepreneurship? 3. How does the Ministry encourage people with disabilities to develop skills related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital transformation? 4. What are the types of assistive technologies provided to disabled people in Oman?

Oman Vision 2040 For People with Disabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is there a team in Oman Vision 2040 that works to create integrated services between the Ministry and other relevant ministries to serve persons with disabilities? 2. Oman Vision 2040- Who follows up on the existing operational plans that support the strategic plan to support persons with disabilities?
Developing Database for Persons with Disabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there any statistics showing the number of entrepreneurs with disabilities? 2. Is there a plan to establish a database for people with disabilities?
Entrepreneurial areas encouraged by Ministry of Social Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the economic sectors on which the policies for disabled people focused on? 2. Does the Ministry help people with disabilities to open their own projects? 3. What are the executive mechanisms for aiding people with disabilities?
Privileges and incentives provided by the Ministry to people with disabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the governmental and non-governmental entities that provide financial support to people with disabilities to enter the field of entrepreneurship? 2. Are there non-refundable grants offered by different parties disabled people? 3. Are there soft loans offered to people with disabilities and how much is it? 4. What are the non-credit facilities provided for people with disabilities? 5. What are the facilities provided by the Ministry to create a work environment for people with disabilities?
Plans to Support Entrepreneurs with Disabilities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are there any plans and agreements with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority to support entrepreneurs with disabilities? 2. Are there plans (programmes - policies) aimed at qualifying people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs?

Source: Author's own work.

Data Collection

To evaluate the policies, procedures, and training programmes that disabled people need to become self-employed, official documents and focused group discussions were used to collect qualitative data. The official documents contained the policy and strategic measures related to people with disabilities. The first focused group was organized with disabled entrepreneurs through google meet application on 11 January 2024. The second focused group discussion was conducted with senior officials at the Directorate General for Disabled Affairs on January 31, 2024. The duration of the discussion was around two hours, with a presentation by the general manager and his specialized team. The collected qualitative data assisted in giving an overall picture of the disabled people's situation in Oman.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Demographic Data of People with Disabilities in Oman

According to census data in 2020 of people with disability in Oman issued by [19], the total number of people with disabilities reached 42,304 persons distributed in various governorates of Oman. Fig. 1 illustrates the numerical distribution of people with disabilities in Oman's Governorates between 2010 and 2020. This Figure shows that the number of disabled people declined from 62,506 persons in 2010 to 42,304 in 2020. In 2010, Dhofar had the highest

number of disabled people amongst all governorates, recording 14,524 persons. In 2020, Al Batinah North recorded the highest number of people with disabilities, which reached 9,394 people, followed by Muscat with 6,706 persons and the numerical distribution of people with disability in Al Wusta was the lowest where it recorded 252 persons only.

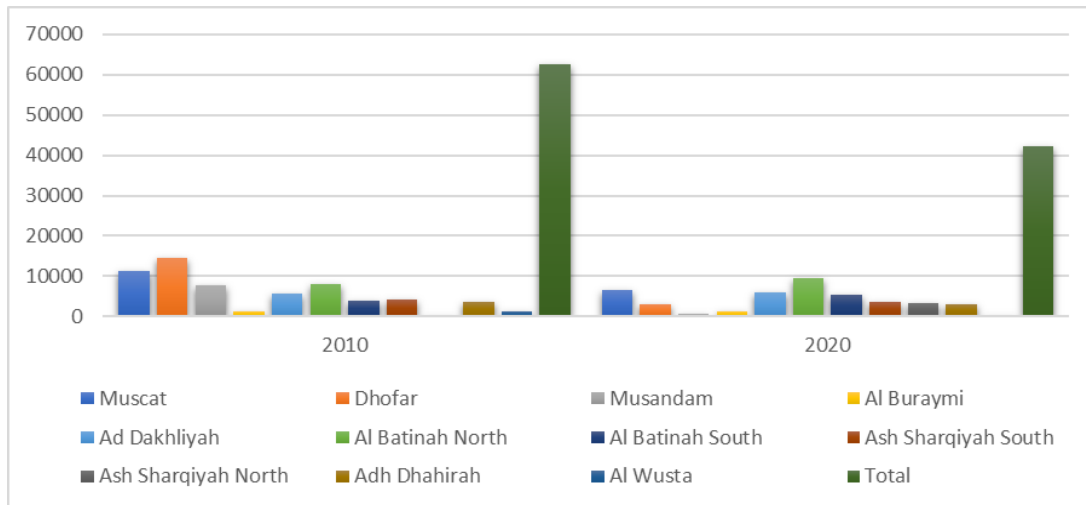


Fig.1: Numerical Distribution of people with disabilities in Oman's Governorates 2010-2020.

Source: National Center for Statistics and Information, 2021.

Fig. 2 represents the numerical distribution of people with disabilities in terms of gender and enrollment of education. It clearly shows substantial decrease in the number of male and female enrolled in education from 13,582 and 7,383, respectively, in 2010, to 3733 and 2750 respectively in 2020. Surprisingly, the total number of people with disabilities who never enrolled in education (12,961 persons) was almost double the total number of those enrolled (6,483) in 2020.

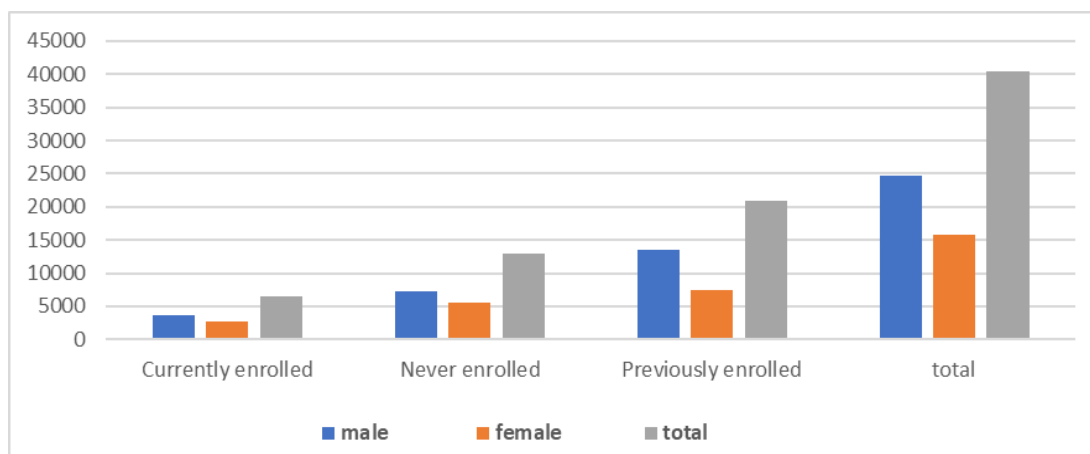


Fig. 2: Distribution of people with disabilities in gender and enrollment of education.

Source: National Center for Statistics and Information, 2021

Fig.3 shows the numerical distribution of people with disabilities in terms gender and level of education. It illustrates that 6,212 males and 4,891 females with disability are illiterate. Also, 2,530 of males with disability and 1,348 of females with disability can read and write only without any qualifications in the education. However, the number of people with disability who

have less than general diploma reached 13,379, where 8,361 are males and 5,018 are females. Interestingly, 6,202 people with disabilities have general diplomas and 1,519 have bachelor and more degrees.

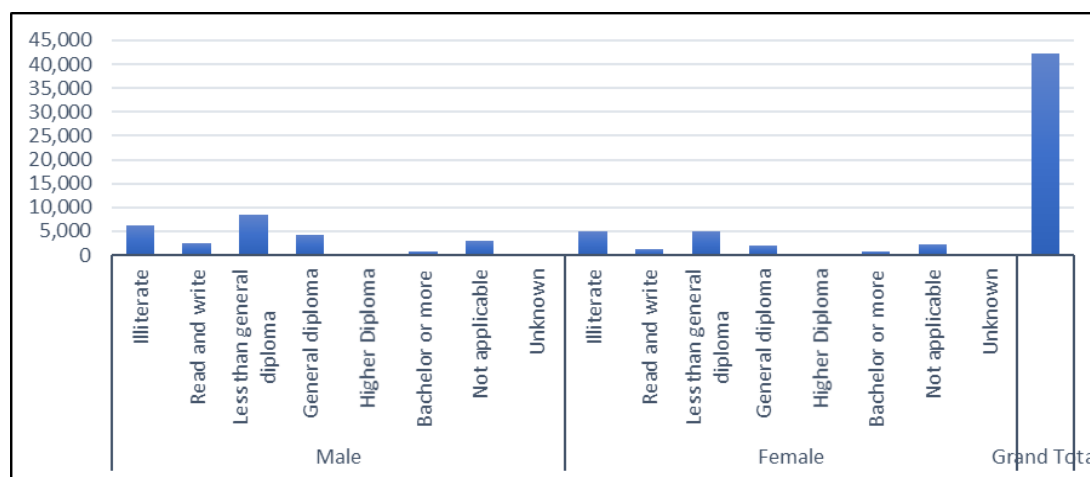


Fig.3: Distribution of people with disabilities in gender and education level.

Source: National Center for Statistics and Information, 2021

Fig.4 shows that the number of males with disability who have jobs are more than the number of females with disability. Disabled business owners accounted for 199, 167 out of them are males and 32 are females. The total number of people with disabilities who are working on wages is 6,301. On the other hand, the number of people with disability who are working on his/her account reached 3,033 people.

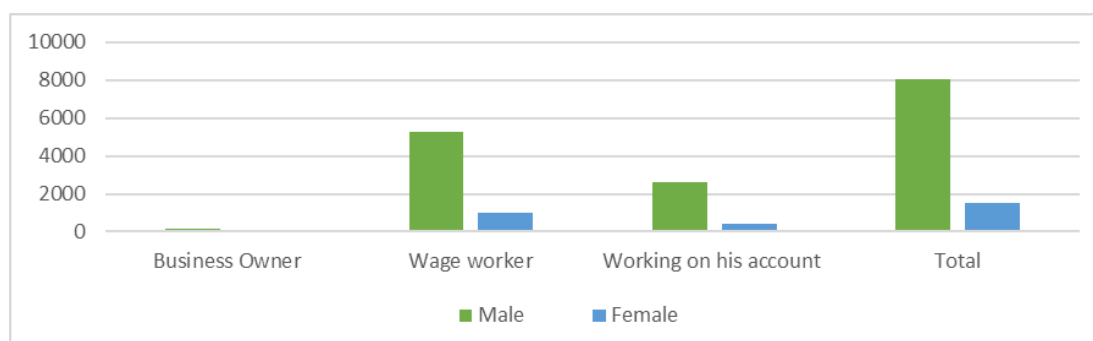


Fig.4: Distribution of people with disabilities in gender and employment Status, 2020.

Source: National Center for Statistics and Information, 2021

Fig.5 represents the numerical distribution of people with disabilities in professions, with writing profession being the most popular job among people with disabilities (1,915), followed by agriculture, livestock, birds and hunting (1,427), main and auxiliary engineering (1,411), and services (1,313). In addition, 1,170 disabled persons worked as managers of management and investors. Sales professions are less favoritism among people with disability, with only 168 persons working in this occupation.

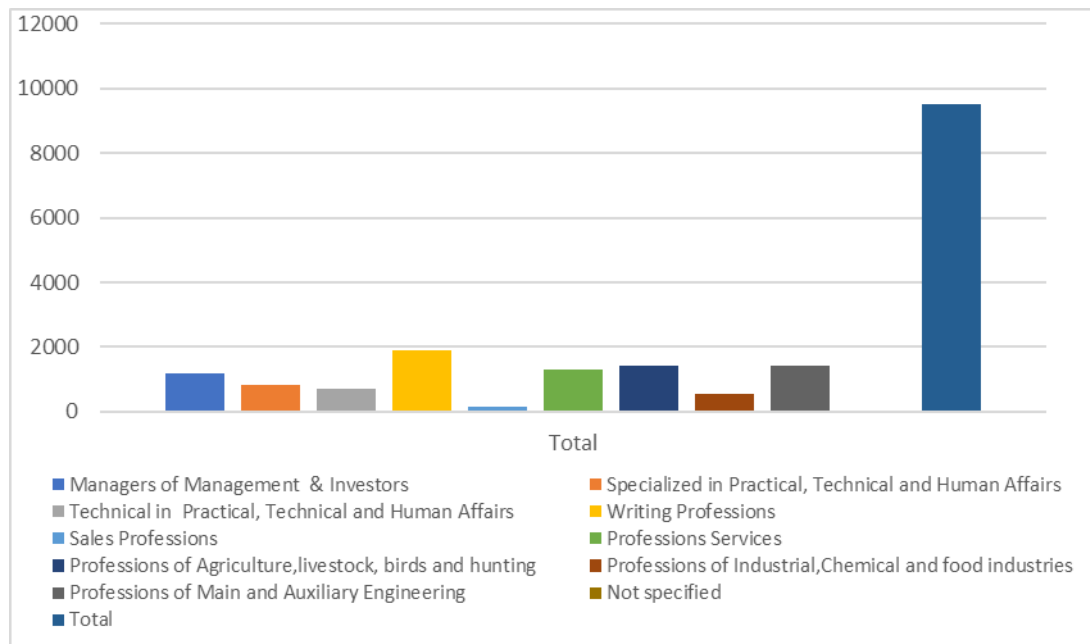


Fig.5: Distribution of people with disabilities in professions.

Source: National Center for Statistics and Information, 2021

Policies Concerning People with Disabilities in Oman

To enhance the social welfare of the people with disabilities, the government established the National Committee of the Care of Persons with Disabilities to form the institutional infrastructure for formulating the policies and rules and making decisions related to disabled people in Oman. If there is a need for financial support, then the request is made by the Council of Ministers, which is responsible for taking the decisions. In terms of offering service for disabled persons, the Directorate General for Disabled Affairs is working as a coordinating body with concerned parties.

Policies Related to Disabled Persons:

In terms of disability policy, the general framework of the rights of people with disabilities focuses on receiving their full rights at all age levels and to be active members in society. The first outcome is designing legislative laws that harmonize state status and the right of people with disabilities convention. The second expected outcome is high-quality, comprehensible rehabilitation programmes and services targeting people with disability. However, and according to the Directorate General for Disabled Affairs, “there is no policy related entrepreneurship for people with disabilities in Oman.” Similarly, there is no clear planning or comprehensive study on how to start a business and what the governmental requirements that are needed by people with disabilities to start their businesses.

Although there are several bodies dealing with regulatory and administrative tasks, none of these bodies have ever taken the responsibility for mentoring, supervising, evaluating, and dealing with projects of people with disabilities, including entrepreneurs with disabilities. The president of Oman Association for Disabled indicated that “disabled entrepreneurs do not need special treatment rather than positive discrimination in terms of having clear plan for disabled entrepreneurs from A to Z”. In addition, CEO of Innovation Factory echoed the previous

statement and stressed that “disabled entrepreneurs need facilities and financial support from formal institutions.”

Empowering Disabled Persons Economically:

The two focused group discussions revealed that Oman is expected to develop a grand strategy with the aim of empowering people with disabilities economically, establishing and implementing protected workshops at the Assessment and Vocational Rehabilitation Center, and designing and executing an integrated operation model programme. The purpose behind formation-protected workshops is offering operational opportunities for mentally disabled persons, and then the products generated through workshops could be presented in the market as income generation for disabled persons. Setting up a manual for an economic empowerment training programme, designing, and implementing an economic empowerment programme in terms of skills needed by disabled people to enter the market are all factors in the success of an integrated operation model programme. This requires collaborative efforts by the concerned authorities for empowering people with disabilities economically, which are the Directorate General for Disabled Affairs through the Assessment and Vocational Rehabilitation Center, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, UNICEF, World Health Organization, universities, and the private sector. The urgency of developing this grand strategy fits well with the perception of disabled entrepreneurs toward government policies, as most of them stressed that they did not find those policies beneficial in financially supporting and running their business.

Training and Awareness Programmes for People with Disabilities

There are five workshops offered through the Assessment and Vocational Rehabilitation Center over one or two years: welding workshops, carpentry workshops, texture workshops, recycling paper workshops, and one workshop related to agriculture. The purpose of the training programmes and workshops organized by the center is to monitor and measure the attitudes of disabled people toward different activities and deciding whether the nature of business is suitable for the type of disability and appropriate in the hometown, and acquire the necessary skills through training, qualifying, and then empowering them to establish their own business. In terms of vocational operation, the center offers a protected work environment against competition at the workplace. If the person can work in an external environment, the disabled person is given permission to work outside as one of the policies in the Ministry of Social Development. The ministry offers on-the-job training through the Assessment and Vocational Rehabilitation Center or in the private sector. After finishing the vocational training, the participants receive a vocational rehabilitation certificate, and then they will be offered the opportunity to work in a private sector to customize their working environment for one month. After one month, the firm will decide whether to recruit the person or not based on their performance. The main challenge for disabled people is that there are no clear texts, decisions, legislation, or policies that support people with disabilities in the field of entrepreneurship. All entrepreneurs, whether with disabilities or otherwise, are treated equally in the system. There are no privileges for people with disabilities.

Database for People with Disabilities

Data analysis shows that the Ministry of Social Development has a database about people with disabilities that is limited to information on geographical distribution, age, gender, and type of disability, but it does not have data of employment status. This means that there is no clear database of entrepreneurs with disabilities. To cover the gap in the unavailability of essential

elements in the disabled database, the ministry is working to establish the National Record of Persons with Disabilities in 2025, with an obligatory decision to link the ID of disabled persons with all the services in the state.

Entrepreneurial Areas Encouraged by Ministry of Social Development

Data shows that carpentry is the most popular craft among people with disabilities especially male due to the numerous job opportunities nationwide. The other crafts are welding, blacksmithing, and paper recycling. Several disabled entrepreneurs benefited from Jisr Al-Khairiya's where it supported five paper recycling workshops where it cooperates with Oman Post. As the type of projects depend on gender, women with disability prefer to practice in the fabric, sewing, and beauty fields. This paved the way for the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion to approve the work-from-home regulation while the Ministry of Social Development providing the tools and machines that females with disabilities need to work from home.

The Incentives Offered by the Ministry of Social Development

The data collected from the two focused groups reveals a contrasting view between the Ministry of Social Development that claims providing technical and financial support for disabled people and the disabled entrepreneurs who argued that "there is not incentives for disabled entrepreneurs" [20]. However, the official documents of the ministry reveal the existence of three types of incentives offered by various institutions:

Brand Incentive (Azm): This brand is an outcome of a cooperation between the Ministry of Social Development and the Al Jiser Foundation to encourage people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs. The products must pass the standards to carry the brand Azm and then compete in the market [20].

Employment Incentive: The government imposed that each company with more than 50 employees must recruit people with disabilities at 2% of its total staffing percentage [20].

Incentives offered by other institutions: Several institutions offer incentives for people with disabilities. For example, insurance companies and airlines offer 50% discounts on their services, and private hospitals offer 30% discounts [20].

DISCUSSION

The findings above stimulate an interesting debate on the effectiveness of disability policy in Oman. Two important remarks should be made here regarding the issue of disability policies. The first is the realization that the main purpose of issuing policies for people with disabilities is improving social welfare. This result is compatible with the findings of [4], [21], who also concluded that the rights of people with disabilities should be reflected in raising their level of well-being, becoming more independent and economic flexibility.

Moreover, my results exhibit opposite views of the governmental bodies and disabled entrepreneurs toward entrepreneurial policy for people with disability. Officials of the Ministry of Social Developed insist that there is a designed strategy for economically empowering people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs through workshops, financial support, and other regulatory issues such as the work-from-home regulation. On the other hand, disabled

entrepreneurs insisted that there is no clear policy that support and help people with disability to become entrepreneurs in Oman.

Whoever is right in their argument, my analysis reaffirms the significant role of the government policy in supporting people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs, a position approved by [11], [21] in the Australian experience in empowering people with disabilities in form of employment, innovation and entrepreneurship, and by [5] in the case of the US experience where government support aims at removing entrepreneurial barriers and challenges, rather than teaching the skills directly based on the market need as it is in Oman experience.

My results confirm that organizing training programmes and workshops in crafts such as carpentry, welding or recycling paper is important to equip people with disabilities with the right skills to empower them economically. The Oman case shows that empowering disabled entrepreneurs happened to be through training rather than formal entrepreneurship courses. This contradicts with the findings of [5], who found that the US experience in empowering disabled entrepreneurs depends on teaching them the business fundamental in terms of establishing the business plan and strategy into presenting the product on the market. When placing this interpretation in the context of Oman, the perception of people with disabilities indicates their discontent with training programmes, hence limiting their effectiveness to helping some disabled people in certain age to earn money, but not providing the necessary skills and knowledge in business.

This study underlined certain challenges faced by people with disabilities to become self-employed, including family beliefs that receiving a fixed monthly salary is more secure than having their own business [22]. A study by [15] reached similar conclusions of social barriers in the family and friends circles and the reluctance of many private sector companies to follow employment policy in recruiting people with disability. For policymaking, the main challenge is absence of database for disabled entrepreneurs. The shortage in the database relative to people with disabilities is reflected in the basic information on geographical distribution, age, gender, and type of disability without taking into consideration if the person is employed, self-employed or unemployed.

My findings also show a strong correlation between gender and the type of business among people with disabilities, with females with disability are more inclined to work in sewing and beauty, while males with disability are interested more in carpentry, welding and paper recycling. When compared with their counterparts in Oman, people with disabilities in Australia depend on modern technology such as car hand control, support delivery, and traveling space for parking, a comparison that reassert the role of culture affinity in choosing the suitable type of business in hometown.

In terms of providing government support to disabled entrepreneurs, my results reveal a sharp contrast between the position held by the ministry's officials who listed the existence of at least three channels for support and the position held by disabled entrepreneurs who did not find those incentives useful in running their business. The current structure in Oman does not fully support disabled entrepreneurs because of the lack of facilities and financial support from formal institutions and reluctance of the financial sector to engage and support rehabilitation programmes and disabled entrepreneurs.

CONCLUSION

This study presented a comprehensive assessment of the status of the people with disability and the levels of effectiveness of disability policy in the Sultanate of Oman. It analyzed the policies and procedures introduced by the Government of Oman to empower people with disabilities to become entrepreneurs. Several policy measures, training programmes, vocational training, and workshops on various professions and crafts were executed by the Ministry of Social Development, many of them were gender oriented, as males with disabilities preferred crafts such as carpentry and welding while females with disabilities favoured sewing, netting and beauty services. The government also made some regulatory changes such as work-from-home to allow people with disabilities, particularly females to work from home.

However, most disabled entrepreneurs considered the current policies and procedures as insufficient to support them to manage the business activities, if there is no financial assistance from the government. This study identified some of the characteristics of the experience of Oman in encouraging people with disabilities to be self-employed, including the dependence on training programmes and vocational workshops without educational courses in business or entrepreneurship to acquire the basic knowledge and skills as in the cases of the US, the EU, and Australia.

Moreover, this study concluded with some practical and policy implications, not least by improving our understanding and creating awareness of the huge challenges faced by disabled people when attempting to start their own businesses. Policy makers should take into consideration the perceptions and views of disabled entrepreneurs in areas such as access to financial assistance, availability of educational programmes in entrepreneurship and business administration, and regulatory changes to help them conduct their business activities with ease and comfort, as current laws do not distinguish between disabled and non-disabled people. Finally, I must stress here that the responsibility of managing disability policy and serving the interests of people with disabilities should be spread across all government departments, financial and academic institutions, and the private sector, with greater collaboration among all these entities for effective policy implementation and greater participation of disabled entrepreneurs in the development process.

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