

**Applying Social Business as a Pathway to Job Creation.  
A Case of People with Disabilities in El Salvador.**

By

**LEMUS ORELLANA, Gabriela Michelle**

**CAPSTONE PROJECT**

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

**MASTER OF PUBLIC MANAGEMENT**

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Committee in charge:

Professor Cho, Yoon Cheong, Supervisor



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**Applying Social Business as a Pathway to Job Creation**  
**A Case of People with Disabilities in El Salvador**

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## **Executive Summary**

Disability is a complex phenomenon. It reflects the interaction between the features of a person's body and the features of the society in which he or she lives. Therefore, overcoming the difficulties faced by people with disabilities requires the participation of different actors and interventions to remove environmental and social barriers (World Health Organization, WHO, 2018). Said interventions tend to vary from one society to another, generally influenced by public policies, education and awareness.

In the case of El Salvador, the attention and priority given to people with disabilities and their needs has been limited. There have been some improvements, particularly in the employment field with the implementation of the Law of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities, the National Policy of Integral Attention for People with Disabilities and the ratification of international conventions; however, it has been a challenge to guarantee the application and enforcement of these instruments and this has impacted negatively the available employment opportunities and financial independence of this sector of the population.

Other structural conditions of the country have also favored the existence of a wide array of barriers that have produced an increasing gap between people with and without disabilities and in many cases have perpetuated poverty. This gap needs to be addressed by different sectors of society since the barriers are imposed and reproduced by multiple actors and affect every aspects of a person's life.

Currently there are some initiatives among companies that have benefited people with disabilities. These initiatives are mainly recognized as Corporate Social Responsibility. The initiatives commonly vary from creation of job banks and job fairs to the training of people with disabilities

in multiple areas, however, the network of inclusive companies and job offers are still limited due to the soft application of laws and sanctions, lack of awareness and particularly, due to psychological barriers imposed by society. It is important to recognize that, even when these initiatives have been beneficial to people with disabilities and also are a good starting point towards inclusion, these should not be regarded as charity since access to equal employment, education, training and other rights are a responsibility that has to be fulfilled and not just a mere act of good will.

It is undeniable that the Salvadoran government and its institutions still have a lot of work to do when it comes to inclusion and enforcing the Law of Equal Opportunities. It is also undeniable that there is an urgent need of opening more spaces and creating more opportunities particularly in the employment field since it is through employment that people can achieve a better quality of life, financial independence and decision-making power. In this context, an initiative that could be well received in El Salvador and that could generate a positive impact in the topic of inclusion and employment for people with disabilities is Social Business. This is a recent trend that is on the rise and is also an innovative alternative that proposes a sustainable way of addressing social and environmental issues that have not been solved or covered by the government.

Fortunately, El Salvador already counts with a network of professionals and groups of people with long experience in this field. There is also a network of trainees with a certain type of disability that are ready to take up on jobs and are just waiting for a job opening. These conditions represent an opportunity for Social Businesses that aim to increase and promote inclusion and start breaking gaps among the different sectors of the Salvadoran society. These businesses are also supported by successful stories in other countries such as the Republic of Korea, Singapore and Spain. These

initiatives demonstrate that the positive impact is not only perceived by the direct beneficiaries but by the whole society since they create an added value and tackle issues that societies have struggled to solve for long periods of time.

The following questions have been selected for this document:

What are the conditions that exist nowadays in El Salvador in regard to disability?

What are the main barriers and challenges that are faced by people with disabilities in El Salvador when it comes to employment opportunities?

What are some of the initiatives that are being implemented by businesses in order to contribute to solving issues in El Salvador?

What are the areas of opportunity that can be used to promote inclusion and generate employment for people with disabilities in El Salvador?

Are there any international examples that can be replicated in El Salvador?

The ultimate and expected goal of this study is understanding the existing barriers for people with disabilities in El Salvador and identifying successful social businesses endeavors that can be replicated in the country as well as detecting opportunity areas that can be used to create sustainable jobs and promote inclusion in the country.

The managerial implications are:

- a) Inclusion and job creation: achieving a more inclusive society through creation of jobs for people with disabilities and ensuring equal access to employment opportunities are



the main implications. This document focuses on employment since it directly impacts a person's life, independence and fulfillment of basic needs.

- b) Financial investment, adequate training and facilities: These are vital for every start up. There are some initiatives that are already working in the disability field and that are ahead in some areas which represents an area of opportunity.
- c) Positioning: social businesses have to be in line with Salvadoran culture, respond to current market trends and earn customers preference and trust. This is key in a country where there are standing stereotypes that surround the topic of disability.
- d) Incorporation of these initiatives in the Government budget: El Salvador's government and the International Community have supported entrepreneurs and some startups in the past with subsidies or seed funding. There is a new wave of support that is now being directed to businesses that create a positive impact in society and that is an opportunity that can be taken by social businesses working for inclusion and generating employment for people with disabilities.

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## **Introduction**

Employment is a vital source of income for people around the world. Therefore, it is important for governments to implement policies and promote initiatives that guarantee equal and plentiful jobs for their citizens. Even when governments work towards better and inclusive employment conditions, unemployment is still an alarming reality for a lot of people worldwide. Unemployment is caused by a wide array of reasons that depend on each country's reality; however, certain groups of the population face similar challenges regardless of where they are located.

People with disabilities share comparable situations around the world. Even when is not at the same level, inclusion remains a challenge. This challenge is reflected at different levels in diverse areas such as education, infrastructure, mobility and many others, however, the area that will be analyzed by this document is employment and lack of employment opportunities for people with disabilities in El Salvador.

El Salvador is a country located in Central America. Employment conditions are hard for most part of the population in part due to the lack of jobs. Unemployment rate is estimated to be 7% at the national level which is considered high for a country with a population of 6 million 581,860 habitants. Out of this population, it is estimated that 463, 075 are people with certain or multiple types of disabilities (Teos, 2018). Some of the Salvadoran population with disabilities count with training and are eligible to work, however, opportunities continue to be limited and not all the companies and institutions employ people with disabilities in their workforce, even when required by law. Deep social divisions and exclusion of some sectors have resulted in weak social fabrics that now affect the country at all levels. Therefore, more inclusive public policies and initiatives

that respond to the diversity of society are needed in order to produce a positive impact in the country, if implemented wisely.

This document will dedicate its efforts to enunciate the employment situation faced by people with disabilities in El Salvador and how some barriers still prevail. Subsequently, this effort will outline the importance of an inclusive society and social responsibility initiatives and how these can positively impact all the population, not only people with disabilities. Finally, it will consider international examples and offer an alternative to the problem by suggesting social businesses as generators of jobs for people with disabilities that are already trained and are just waiting for an opportunity that allows them to be financially independent.

## **Literature Review**

In general, the topic of disability is still new or unknown to many Salvadorans. This creates a direct impact on the rights of people with disabilities and how they interact with their environment. When it comes to employment, El Salvador took steps forward in the year 2000 with the Law of Equal Opportunities that was implemented under the mandate of the President Francisco Flores. This law recognizes the need of working for a more inclusive job market, equal opportunities and inclusion. It is important since it set the guidelines regarding disability employment and education and set minimum standards that need to be met by employers i.e. like the minimum number of employees with disability that should work in a company, need of adequate training and education, and others. It also determined the sanctions that should be imposed when breaking this law. This regulation plays an important role when it comes to training, education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities in El Salvador. It is important to analyze is the measures contained in it, particularly now, when is almost twenty years have passed since its implementation in the country since it might now respond to the current reality that this sector is living.

In order to implement adequate actions and respond efficiently to people's needs it is imperative to understand the situation they are living. Unfortunately, in El Salvador there is still a lot to learn about disability and there is a lot of work that needs to be done regarding this topic. Until this day there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of the real conditions that surround people with disabilities and therefore, the actions that have been implemented do not necessarily respond to their needs. The Analysis and Characterization of People with Disabilities plays a key role since is based on the results obtained during a national survey that took place in 2015 and it illustrates the reality that is faced by this group. This document was elaborated through a collaboration between the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, National Council for

Inclusion of People with Disabilities (CONAIPD), the National Direction for Statistics and Census (DYGESTIC) and the Government of El Salvador. It contains information about the sociodemographic characteristics of people with disabilities, education, employment, housing, type of disability and the existing regulatory framework. Said analysis also presents the levels of participation of people with disabilities, the existing gaps when compared with their peers that do not have disabilities and the persistent discrimination that they face in the Salvadoran society. This data aids to generate a better understanding of the actual barriers that surround this sector of the population, the impact of the actions taken by the governments and it certainly sheds light on the actions that need to be taken to guarantee the fulfillment of their rights and improve their overall quality of life.

It is vital to define lines of action that bring better quality of life for the population that has one or more disabilities and that contribute to better society for everyone; particularly now that El Salvador counts with more recent information about what it means to live with a disability in this country and how that impacts the access to training, education and employment. In this sense, the report denominated as The Economic Costs of Exclusion and Gains of Inclusion of People with Disabilities, Evidence from Low- and Middle-Income Countries written by Lena Morgon Banks and Sarah Polack in collaboration with the International Centre for Evidence in Disability and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, is important. This document examines how exclusion creates a significant economic burden for individuals and their families and how also carries high costs to societies. It also shows how even when creating inclusive societies involves financial investments, inaction has a higher cost that not is not necessarily limited to the economic aspect. The report also highlights how failure to address the link between poverty and disability

eventually stalls progress towards economic growth and development at the national and international level.

Finally, the creation of employment opportunities for people with disabilities is fundamental in order to fulfill their rights, guarantee their acquisitive power and guarantee their independence. Due to the limited resources and funding that are normally allocated to the disability area it is necessary to find innovative and auto sustainable solutions that also appeal to the public. The 2020 Impact Report that was elaborated by the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship in close collaboration with the World Economic Forum provides an insight on how social entrepreneurship has influenced positively the global networks and communities. This model of business has proved to be positive and it has delivered successful results while working to solve problems such as literacy, HIV treatments, tackling poverty and homelessness, among others. The versatility, adaptability and innovative nature of social businesses added to stories of success in other societies present them as a strong alternative for the case of disability and employment opportunities in El Salvador.

## Methodology

This document used a qualitative approach by selecting people with disabilities in El Salvador, particularly the ones that are in the conditions to be employed, as the group of study. The study is descriptive and aims to answer the question: why do people with disabilities still have limited access to employment in El Salvador? Therefore, the document focuses in understanding the current employment opportunities that are available for people with disabilities and how these are impacted by multiple barriers.

Is important to ask this question since it will help sensitize and educate the Salvadoran population about disability. An inclusive society with fair opportunities cannot be constructed if the needs of one part of the population are unknown or discarded and, certainly, no accurate solutions can be explored if the problem is not acknowledged. Understanding the topic of disability and the challenges that surround it is key to propose alternatives that respond to the current reality, generate more opportunities and guide our path towards inclusion.

The methods that were used to gather information were the following:

**Interviews:** Disability is a topic that evolves continuously. It can be perceived from different perspectives, and even sometimes, not perceived at all if there is no interaction with people with disabilities. In order to gain an accurate understanding of this topic and the current challenges, this study relies on interviews with experts that work in the field of disability and people with disabilities that live in El Salvador. In order to gain a deeper and objective understanding of the topic, and due to the qualitative nature of this document, the interviews consisted on open-ended questions. Two interviewees responded to an average of thirteen questions and the third interviewee responded to a seven-question interview. The total amount of questions varies because two of the interviewees responded to questions about their experience of living with a disability in



El Salvador. The third interview was more focused on the functioning of the institution La Rioja. The questions contained in the interviews are exploratory and inquire, mainly, about the employment opportunities in the country and the barriers and challenges, if any, that are present in the environment. The interviews also include a predictive question in order to gather feedback on the feasibility of social businesses in El Salvador. The interviewees were selected due to their experience working in the topic and the knowledge each of them has in a different type of disability which is important in order to achieve more representativity. The persons that were interviewed are the following: A professional in Special Education, the Director and Sub Director of the Pioneer Training Center for People with Disabilities "La Rioja", she counts with vast experience in the topic of disability and also is the current director of La Rioja, an educational center that focuses in psycho social disabilities.; Jaime Vasquez, a Salvadoran Community Manager who has a blog dedicated to create awareness about disability. He has a motor disability, so he speaks from his own experience and knowledge; finally, Julio Canizalez, the Director of the Cultural House for Blind People. He has experience working for projects directed to people with disabilities, inclusion and awareness. He also shares his experience of living with a visual disability in El Salvador. Their opinions, experiences and knowledge have been key to go beyond the laws and publicity and have allowed a deeper understanding of disability, inclusion and employment in El Salvador. These insights have also shed light on how Salvadorans can start working for a society that is more inclusive.

**Observation:**

The environment where a person with disabilities lives is crucial. This environment and the accessibility in it will determine, to a great extent, their access to opportunities and their individual development. This accessibility needs to be guaranteed everywhere: in public and recreational

spaces, hospitals, schools, transportation, and others and in most cases, this can be evaluated just by taking the public transportation, taking a walk on the park or visiting schools. For this document, the municipalities of San Salvador and La Libertad, the capital of the country and one of the most advanced cities respectively, were taken as a parameter. The National University (UES), a private University Universidad Doctor José Matías Delgado, Downtown San Salvador, surroundings of the Monument El Salvador del Mundo and Multiplaza and La Gran Via malls were visited in order to observe the levels of accessibility. Public transportation routes 44, 101 and 30 were used in order to verify accessibility in this area. Some of the parameters that were evaluated in this observation exercise were the presence of proper signage (braille, alarms, and others), presence of ramps and or elevators, adequate space and transportation units being at the ground level so wheelchairs can easily access, etc.

**Study of existing organizational documents, forms and reports:**

Gathering of documents, current laws and conventions, cases of success and other documents was key to the elaboration of this study. These documents provided a framework and a deeper understanding of the topic which were useful at the moment of interviewing, observing and working in this document.

## **1. Disability in El Salvador**

El Salvador is a country with deep and complex problems that have persisted for decades and that have dominated most of the government's efforts. These problems include violence, crime, poverty, natural disasters and weak institutions. The attention given to these issues has diverted the importance that other topics, such as disability, should receive.

Disability is one of those areas that has been barely addressed throughout the years. It is not normally included in the political campaigns nor government agendas and the population seems to pay few to any attention unless they are impacted directly. The lack of attention given to this topic is notorious when taking into consideration that there was no clear information and consistent data about the conditions faced by this sector of the population. This is key when understanding the current barriers and lack of actions taken since is not possible to address an unknown or unacknowledged problem.

Fortunately, some positive steps have been taken and in 2015 a National Survey was conducted. This was not the first attempt that was made in order to obtain data regarding people with disabilities, however, it is the most recent one and it presents reliable and meaningful information. The survey used a sample of 5,102 homes and a total of 19,504 people which later resulted in a characterization of people with disabilities and the conditions they live in (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015). It gathered socio-demographic data and information about education, housing, employment, workplace conditions, accessibility, rehabilitation and other support services. (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015). According to the characterization, it is estimated that in El Salvador 463,075 people live with one or more disabilities that vary between physical, visual, impaired hearing, intellectual, mental, psychosocial and communication disabilities. (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015). Out of this percentage, 343,131 are adults and 119,944 are children and adolescents. It was also

observed that, even though is not a significant difference, disability prevails in females and in population with lower incomes (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015).

The Survey also evaluated the types of disabilities and it found that physical disability prevails with a percentage of 4.1%, followed by visual disability with a 3.0%, hearing disability with 1.8%, intellectual disability presented by 1.3%, psychosocial disability with a 0.8% and difficulties in communication with a 0.8% (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015). When it comes to the fulfilment of rights, the characterization encountered that people with disabilities do participate in Salvadoran society, but they do it from a disadvantaged position; when it comes to employment people with disabilities participate less when compared with their peers that do not have disabilities and also, work conditions are not equal (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015). People with disabilities also present lower levels of schooling; higher levels of chronic conditions; lower access to basic services, adequate housing, information and communications (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015).

This information illustrates the conditions that are endured by people with disabilities, and that are in most cases, a result of the deep barriers that prevail in the country and the lack of informed actions. It also provides insightful data that should be used to define concrete policies and programs that promote inclusion and fulfill the human rights of people with disabilities.

El Salvador counts now with a recently elected president. No guidelines or plans regarding disability were addressed during his political campaign or presented in his government plan which leads to uncertainty when it comes to addressing this topic and protecting people with disabilities. This also reinforces the need of working for a more inclusive society and looking for alternatives that generate better conditions for everyone.

## **1.1 Regulatory Framework in El Salvador**

El Salvador has established a legal foundation towards inclusion of people with disabilities and the guaranteeing of their rights, particularly in the employment field. This framework takes as starting point articles in the General Constitution of the Republic of El Salvador, the ratification of international instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities and the Millennium Development Goals; it also includes national instruments as the Decree 80 and 65 and the creation of the National Council for Inclusion of People with Disabilities (CONAIPD for its acronym in Spanish), technical guides for architectonic constructions, manuals and other documents.

Regarding employment opportunities and trainings, the following instruments are fundamental:

- **Law of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities:**

The Law of Equal Opportunities set an important precedent in the subject of disability in El Salvador. This law recognizes that there is a need of implementing measures that guarantee equal employment opportunities and inclusion. It gives a legal and regulatory background that promotes employment and, more importantly, establishes sanctions for the companies that do not act according to the law.

It was implemented in the year 2000 and its primary objective was setting parameters that guarantee the equal access to jobs for people with disabilities. It establishes that the person with disability has the right of being protected against every form of discrimination, exploitation and any other type of abuse. It also establishes their right to receive education with an adequate methodology; to receive training, labor and professional rehabilitation; to obtain a job, get paid for

the work performed and not being fired due to their disability; it also established their right to access to scholarships and to make use of adequate and accessible public and private facilities. The 4th and 5th Chapter of this law are dedicated to education and labor integration making a point that public and private institutions are responsible for promoting employment and education for people with disabilities. (National Assembly, 2000).

As mentioned above, this law represents an important milestone since it recognizes the responsibility of being a fair and inclusive employer and establishes sanctions for those that are not. However, this law has not been updated and does not necessarily respond to the current employment situation.

The law establishes that at least one person with disabilities must be hired per twenty-five employees without disabilities which might not give enough opportunities to all the job seekers. Also, the sanctions are not strict enough since if an employer breaks the law the highest applicable penalty is \$57.14 USD per case (National Legislative Assembly, 2000) and in many occasions, employers prefer paying the fine instead of hiring people with disabilities since they consider that training and accommodating the work place would be more costly.

- **National Policy of Integral Attention for People with Disabilities:**

This policy was implemented in 2014 as a response to the urgent need of eliminating discriminatory practices, the necessity of accomplishing an inclusive society and mainly, the urgent need of guaranteeing the rights of persons with disabilities.

This instrument is an important statement since is a recognition of the responsibility that all institutions and actors of society have in order to achieve an inclusive society with equal rights and opportunities for all sectors of the population. It also outlines and recognizes the barriers that

have always existed and that have prevented people with disabilities from the enjoyment of a good quality of life and fulfilled rights. This policy is also a result of a collaboration between the government, people with disabilities, their families and experts in the field, therefore, the information is accurate and represents the reality of this group which is necessary in order to implement effective policies and actions.

The policy takes some elements from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and it provides a context of disability in El Salvador by outlining the barriers that are faced by this group. It also establishes objectives, strategies and lines of action. It is important to pay special attention to the fifth and sixth objective outlined in this policy. The fifth objective is dedicated to promoting effective measures that guarantee the access and permanence of people with disabilities in all educational levels until their studies are completed. This implies the elimination of all barriers that prevent people with disabilities from going to school or that represent an obstacle for their participation in the educational system. The sixth objective of the policy is ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to employment and promoting other employment initiatives, it also establishes a strategy providing vocational and professional training so people with disabilities can be competitive and, finally, it recognizes the need of promoting the creation of employment for this sector. (Presidency of the Republic of El Salvador, 2014)

It is undeniable that these instruments represent a step forward and that they provide guidelines when it comes to disability in El Salvador. However, as observed and expressed by interviewees, for now reality is far from what is described in these documents and the real challenge still remains in the materialization of the objectives, strategies and lines of actions established in the policy and

the law mentioned above since there is a need of resources, stronger laws, coordination and follow up, and also institutions need to be actively involved.

## 1.2 Challenges and Barriers for People with Disabilities in El Salvador

The existence of a disability or more impacts directly all aspects of life of the person, it also affects people that surround him or her and eventually determines their overall quality of life since the way they interact with society is limited in meaningful and varied ways.

El Salvador is a country that still needs to improve its approach towards disability and make it a priority in the government agenda in order to improve the current conditions faced by these individuals and their close relatives. The following indicators were obtained from the age group of 18 years old and older and it helps to better comprehend the gap that still exists between people with disabilities and people without disabilities and shows a disadvantage between both groups that affects a broad range of aspects: (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015)

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>No disability</b>	<b>With a disability</b>
Labor participation rate	68.7%	50.9%
Average monthly income	\$294.84	\$170.43
Percentage of wage earners	68.3%	51.0%
Unpaid family workers	4.2%	8.6%
Schooling	7.9	4.2
Inadequate housing	29.4%	37.8%
Access to water	78.7%	77.3%
Access to sanitation	56.5%	55.0%
Access to electricity	96.3%	93.1%
Internet access	20.4%	13.9%
Access to telephone	95.0%	87.3%
Faces a chronic illness	3.0%	34.8%



Historically, people with disabilities have been an invisible sector of the Salvadoran population, therefore, their rights and needs have not been fully acknowledged for a long time which has perpetuated them as subjects of exclusion and discrimination. This has created a deep and growing gap between people with disabilities and those who do not have a disability. There have been some initiatives throughout the years that tried to measure the quality of life and the fulfillment of people with disabilities' rights, however, no priority was given, and the Salvadoran Society continued to move forward without an inclusive approach. Soon, buildings, roads, schools, curriculums, recreational activities and job requirements were designed without considering this vulnerable sector and ignoring their rights and needs became the common rule.

It is undeniable that El Salvador has experimented some progress in the disability field, mainly, due to the perseverance of internal groups that work in the topic and due to advances made by the International Community and other countries that are ahead in this field; however, inclusion still remains a challenge for Salvadorans, particularly when education plans, architectural designs, transportation and other aspects were built with a non-inclusive approach. Therefore, laws, institutions and society in general still have a long way to go in order to break the existing barriers and, more importantly, create a different mindset that recognizes the value and importance of inclusion and equal access to opportunities. (V. Zaldaña, personal communication, July 1, 2019)

The Salvadoran Law of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities identifies the main barriers that exist and that need to be overcome in order to provide a better quality of life and fulfill the rights of people with disabilities (National Assembly, 2000). Said barriers are the following:

**Urban barriers:** Which are described by the law as the barriers presented in the structures and urban mobiliary, historical sites and other public and private spaces. (National Assembly, 2000). As mentioned by the interviewees Jaime Vasquez and Julio Canizalez

(who have a motor disability and visual disability, respectively) urban barriers are one of the main adverse conditions they live with. The current designs of the cities in El Salvador do not allow people with disabilities to be completely independent and to mobilize with ease around public or private spaces without the assistance of others. (J. Vasquez & J. Canizalez, personal communication, February 2020)

In Jaime's case, the absence of ramps in the streets, public spaces and the surroundings of the university he attends have complicated his commute to basic activities. Normally, he is assisted by his friends or family but that should not be the case since every person should be allowed to enjoy their independence and not be limited by the design of the environment they live in. This design that does not consider the needs of people with disabilities also represents a risk for their safety, since it makes it difficult for them to commute and sometimes they have to make maneuvers that allow them to go up and down the stairs, cross streets and move around the city. (J. Vasquez & J. Canizalez, personal communication, February 2020)

The urban barriers also prevent people with disabilities from being active members of society since it makes it hard for people to attend school or work and they cannot participate of public and cultural activities, visit historical sites, attend concerts, parades and other events or even fulfill their basic needs like attending a medical appointment.

- **Architectural barriers:** There are the barriers that are found inside of the public and private buildings. (National Assembly, 2000).

Barriers are not limited to the exterior. There is an evident lack of accessibility inside most buildings and facilities. There are no ramps, no elevators and there is an obvious absence of visual, tactile and auditive signs inside the public and most private buildings. There has

been some progress in this area since there is a Technical Guidance that was released on 2011 that provides parameters that need to be included in the building facilities in order to make them accessible. However, this is more commonly seen in new edifications. While the existing ones have not been updated, in many cases due to lack of funds or because it is not a priority and also it has not been required by law or enforced by any institutions.

These barriers are particularly common and alarming in schools, universities and training centers. As Jaime Vasquez recalls in his interview, one of the biggest obstacles he has had while studying his university degree has been getting to his classes in the second floor. There are no ramps or elevators in the university he attends. Installations also lack proper evacuation protocols and visual, tactile and auditive communication channels making it hard for people with disabilities to get involved in different types of activities from going to class, getting a meal with their family and friends in a restaurant, participate in public activities to running some errands or in the most pressing situations, just being able to evacuate the buildings.

- **Communication barriers:** These are defined as obstacles or difficulties in the comprehension, lecture and understanding of verbal and visual messages and the usage of available tools for people with different types and levels of disabilities. (National Assembly, 2000).

As explained by Julio Canizalez, the absence of proper communication methods and equipment that facilitate an adequate learning process or the integration of people with disabilities with others is one of the major challenges. Communication is key in social groups but absence of proper channels and the poor knowledge about disability generates, in some cases, the segregation and exclusion of people with disabilities and prevent them

from being active members of society. We can take as an example the case of hearing impairment; there is a lack of interpreters and few people know sign language making it hard for people with this disability to communicate in hospitals, schools and society in general. In many cases people with hearing impairment do not know sign language neither know how to read nor write due to poor access to institutions that are prepared to teach the language or as a product of the other barriers.

- **Transportation barriers:** Transportation barriers refer to those obstacles that are presented by individual or collective transportation units. (National Assembly, 2000).

In El Salvador, public transportation units are not modern and are not suited for people with disabilities. These units, that in some cases are over 40 years old, are not accessible for people with disabilities either because they are too high and is impossible for a person in a wheelchair to enter and exit without other people's assistance or because the internal design is too small, and it does not fit wheelchairs. The design is still not appropriate for people with other types of motor disabilities. In addition, the current situation of public transportation, which results in extremely crowded units that exceed their capacity, does not result in an accessible nor safe space for people. Signs, proper information and voice announcement of the stops and routes are also missing which makes it difficult for people with other types of disabilities.

- **Cultural barriers:** This refers to all the obstacles that hinder the access to written or verbal information or participation in cultural and recreational events (National Legislative Assembly, 2000). Is uncommon for public events to have interpreters for people with hearing impairments, cultural and recreational events do not count with information in braille method and there are no alternative methods of communication that allow the

dissemination of information during events. This negatively impacts the participation of people with disabilities and the full enjoyment of said events.

- **Psychological barriers:** These are the barriers that are imposed by society and include prejudice, stigmatization, distorted perception of people with disabilities and deformed conceptions of aptitudes. (National Assembly, 2000).

All the barriers that have been mentioned prevent people with disabilities from participating in society, living their lives to the fullest and fulfilling their basic needs such as employment and education. The barriers are experienced in different scales depending on the type of disability, however, there is one barrier that is equally severe. From the experience of the interviewees to the information gathered, the psychological barrier prevails.

In El Salvador, prejudice towards people with disabilities is unfair and deeply engrained in society; the lack of knowledge in the topic only makes it worst. As mentioned by Jaime Vasquez in one of his blog entries and as stated in his interview, disability is still a taboo. There are plenty of misconceptions that surround it. Some people think is a punishment from God due to sins committed by their parents or family, other people still think that people with disabilities are sick and that are incapable of going to school, having jobs or even falling in love. This barrier also translates to indifference which later turns into lack of actions that promote inclusion from civil society or government institutions.

As interviewees state, there is a lot of indifference towards this topic. People are not interested in learning and do not feel the need of supporting initiatives that promote inclusion or often interpret them as pure charity instead of a matter of human rights. These preconceived concepts affect the way society sees disability deepening and perpetuating the existing gap between people with

disabilities and people that do not have disabilities. This gap translates in less opportunities, discrimination, bullying, constant stress for people with disabilities due to the need of proving themselves all the time, and others. The lack of support provided by the government, the other barriers mentioned previously, and the psychological barriers also cause segregation since people with disabilities cannot fully integrate and be active members of society. They also create a direct impact on education, employment and overall quality of life of people with disabilities.

### **1.3 Education, Training and Employment for People with Disabilities in El Salvador**

El Salvador is considered the 5<sup>th</sup> country with the lowest percentage of people that conclude secondary school education in Latin America. The coverage of the education system is fair but there are still challenges that need to be addressed, particularly when it comes to the quality of education. The average schooling is 6.8 grades. It is also estimated that 5.1% of people in El Salvador live in conditions of analphabetism. Access to education services is a challenge for many and the reasons vary between low incomes, insecurity, and difficult access to education centers among others (Teos, 2018).

Since 2014, the country has reported an unemployment rate of 7%, one of the highest rates in Central America (Teos, 2018). The levels of informal employment are high and attending school does not guarantee a decent or good paying job, especially in a country where the minimum wage ranges from \$202.88 USD to \$304.17 USD a month depending on the sector the worker belongs to (Salvadoran Ministry of Labor and Social Prevention, Minimum Wages). The aforementioned salaries are critical when we consider that the basic food basket price is set between \$144.04 USD and \$200.86 USD depending on the area of residence (El Mundo Newspaper, 2019). This

information helps to better understand some of the challenges that are faced by different sectors of society in El Salvador, regardless the level of education. But what happens when a disability or more are added into the situation? Disadvantages, lack of education and/or training, unemployment and underemployment rates tend to increase.

When it comes to education, the data obtained by the National Analysis conducted in 2015 showed that people with disabilities are less likely to participate in the education system. By the end of 2018 a total of 11,367 students with disabilities were registered, most of them enrolled in basic education (Salvadoran National Council for People with Disabilities, 2018). The participation of people with disabilities is higher in the public sector, however, the level of preparedness that schools have is debatable. Normally, when schools are faced with students with any type of disabilities professors focus mainly on the development of basic literacy skills and leave behind other educational aspects. This might be due to the lack of experience and/or training that is offered to the professors and also due to the lack of resources of the schools, overpopulation in classrooms, and others. Also, even though the Ministry of Education has established an Inclusive Education Policy, there is still a lot to do when it comes to providing enough services for people with disabilities in school age. As mentioned during the interviews, some of the main obstacles in the education field include the lack of adequate materials for people with different disabilities. These materials are needed so people with disabilities are not in disadvantage with the rest of the class and gain access to the same knowledge. Also, installations are not accessible, the pensums and curricula in all education levels are not adapted for people with disabilities and the professors lack skills and training that allow them to reach their students with disabilities. In this sense, support of the government is vital, but its role has been very passive. (V. Zaldaña, personal communication, July 1, 2019)

This national survey also showed that people with disabilities are less likely to participate in the job market. Only the 50.9% of people with disabilities between 18 to 59 years old are considered to be economically active which contrasts with the 68.7% of people without disabilities that are in the same age range. The information obtained demonstrated that people with disabilities in El Salvador have a smaller participation in the job market and that also have worst employment conditions: (UNICEF & CONAIPD, 2015)

- People with disabilities are less likely to find a full-time job (68.4% compared with 77.4% of people without disabilities).
- The salaries earned by people with disabilities are significantly inferior when compared to those salaries earned by people without disabilities (\$170.43 USD per month and \$294.84 USD per month respectively).
- Out of all the people with disabilities that are employed, just half of them receive a salary.
- Also, people with disabilities have higher possibilities of being under employed or working with their families without earning a salary.

As mentioned by the Director of the Cultural Center for Blind People in El Salvador, a big portion of the population with disabilities tries to start their own business. This is mainly because there is a lack of job offers for them. Some companies are open to providing opportunities to people with disabilities, but this implies that they have to adapt their facilities and make them accessible which results in investments that most companies are not willing to make.

In other cases, when people with disabilities get jobs, it is hard for them to assist everyday due to the urban barriers that are present around the country. Besides all the obstacles that this sector has to face on a daily basis, it is interesting that, in the interviews and information gathered, the main problems, and probably the hardest to solve, are the prevailing perception, prejudice and stigma



about people with disabilities. As stated by all the interviewees, opportunities are not being given because it is assumed that they cannot perform tasks efficiently even when they count with higher education degrees and with advanced training. Also, even when El Salvador counts with a law that promotes employment for people with disabilities and is supposed to count with a job bank, the follow up and enforcement is poor due to the passive role of the government in this field and the lack of supervision. Also, the job offers are very limited and, in some cases, as explained by Jaime Vasquez, professional jobs are not offered to people with disabilities disregarding their professional degrees and training and denying them the opportunity of advancing in their professional career just because there is a disability in the equation.

## **2. Corporate Social Responsibility and Social Businesses**

Corporations and businesses are a big part of every society and they play a fundamental role when it comes to the generation of employment and setting examples for good practices. Even in the most advanced societies, there are problems that have not been entirely covered, or covered at all, by the government or other institutions and that is when some corporations and social businesses step in to fill the gap with their initiatives.

### **2.1 Corporate Social Responsibility**

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has seen its popularity grow in the recent years. Still, some businesses and people are not familiar with the term. This is in part because sometimes it is shaped according to government priorities, community needs and other predominant aspects of society. This concept was brought to life in 1953 and it referred to the fundamental morality in the way a company behaves towards society (Bowen, *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman*). Large conglomerate corporations were expanding and so did the idea of Corporate Social Responsibility. In the 1980's the concept continued to evolve, and more companies incorporated social interests in their businesses practices while becoming more responsive to stakeholders (Thomas, 2019).

Nowadays, Corporate Social Responsibility is a parameter that helps evaluating corporate behavior. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) defines it as the way through which a company achieves a balance of economic, environmental and social imperatives while addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders. CSR is also a popular concept that is embedded in the culture of most of the large corporations and is a growing trend in medium and small enterprises. Some of its benefits include improvement of the company's reputation;

motivates, attracts and retains good employees; enhancement of relations with host governments and other external stakeholders; improvement of existing skills and generation of new abilities, among others (Hopkins, Michael 2012).

The problematics that are addressed by CSR vary from one society to another and from one company to another. Nowadays, some of the most predominant issues of interest for CSR include environmental management, eco-efficiency, responsible sourcing, improvement of labor policies, social equity, gender balance, human rights among other topics (UNIDO, 2020).

As mentioned previously, CSR is a growing trend, particularly with the new generations of customers that prefer companies that generate a positive impact in society and the environment. Some examples of this initiative and the positive impact include the following companies that are known worldwide (Digital Market Institute, 2020):

- Johnson & Johnson: Their initiatives range from leveraging the power of the wind to providing safe water to communities around the world.
- Starbucks: they are building a diverse workforce and have pledged to hire 25,000 veterans by 2025, they are also looking into hiring younger by giving them their first job and they have partnered with the UN Refugee Agency in an effort to provide jobs to 10,000 refugees by 2022.
- TOMS: this company has donated over 60 million pairs of shoes to children in need. Their Social Responsibility initiatives also include assisting the visually impaired by providing prescription glasses and medical treatments, providing safe drinking water and building businesses in developing countries to create jobs. This company is also a strong anti-bullying advocate and works with several non-governmental organizations and nonprofits to set examples of ethical behavior.

The idea of corporations having a responsibility towards society and the environment has delivered positive results throughout the years and has significantly impacted different communities across the globe. However, the main objectives of these companies remain oriented to maximizing their profits and being competitive in the market and their responsibility initiatives are just an added value or activity. In this sense, it is crucial to distinguish CSR, from charities, sponsorships, philanthropy and the recent trend of Social Businesses.

## **2.2 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in El Salvador**

Nowadays, the number of companies that voluntarily engage in initiatives that contribute to society is growing. This is in part, due to the influence of international trends that promote the importance of creating a positive impact. According to the study published by the Salvadoran Foundation for Development (known as FUSADES), in recent years the knowledge about CSR has grown among the Salvadoran businesses and there has also been a positive adoption of practices that benefit internal and external groups. CSR is more common among big and medium-sized businesses, but small businesses are also starting to incorporate the concept in their operations.

The support provided by businesses to solve social problems has increased. According to the study published by FUSADES, 72% of businesses have projects or support social causes. An important observation outlined in this study is that, even though the knowledge about CSR has increased there is still a lot of ambiguity surrounding the concept since only 14% of businesses had a CSR Committee or a designated person and just a 9% had a CSR strategy. When it comes to benefits perceived by businesses that practice CSR in El Salvador, the main one is related to the prestige or recognition that the brand obtains due to the positive impact they generate in the community and the main internal benefit is related to the employees development and motivation which at the

end contributes to the company's development. The CSR focus areas in El Salvador are diverse and include income and job creation, education, sports, leadership, violence prevention and health. Businesses normally partner with other actors in order to create a positive impact and make an investment in social causes. These actors commonly include foundations, private institutions, associations, non-governmental organizations, municipalities or other government institutions like the Police Department, schools and clinics. Enterprises normally provide their support in monetary donations, in-kind donations of their products or services or other types of products needed by the beneficiaries.

One of the main promoters of the Corporate Social Responsibility is the Business foundation for the Social Action in El Salvador, better known as FUNDEMAS for its name in Spanish. This organization started in the year 2000 as a response to the need of including values in business operations and pursuing sustainable social and economic development in the country. They define Corporate Social Responsibility as a “way of making competitive business by allowing enterprises to incorporate better practices and policies that benefit actionists, the community, the environment and all the value chain through the adoption of measures that are aligned with their business strategy but that also contribute to sustainable development.” (FUNDEMAS, 2019).

This foundation promotes the inclusion of people with any type of disability into the workforce of their partners. They consider inclusion of people with disabilities as an initiative that promotes sustainable development. In pro of inclusion, they hosted a job fair in El Salvador in the year 2017. The event counted with the participation of 28 businesses that offered 200 employment vacancies to people with disabilities. The jobs offered ranged from customer service executives, bank agency managers, administrative assistants etc. (FUNDEMAS, 2019). Also, since the foundation has identified the inclusion of people with disabilities in the Salvadoran workforce as one of the most

complex and deep challenges, they created in conjunction with the Government of Australia, the project named “Disability as an Ability”. This project has as its main objective the promotion of employment for people with disabilities by designing tools for the companies and by establishing alliances with Salvadoran businesses. This project has been active for two years and so far, 18 businesses and 3 universities have been trained in the design of more inclusive strategies. In addition, 41 people with physical and intellectual disabilities have been trained in entrepreneurship and a job bank for people with disabilities was created. (FUNDEMÁS, 2019)

The initiatives mentioned above are a positive start that will hopefully spread to other companies in the country. It is important to mention that disability and inclusion are not the priority areas of CSR in El Salvador. Therefore, initiatives that promote inclusion are fundamental particularly because the main barriers that are faced by people with disabilities are considered to be psychological which results in discrimination.

### **2.3 Social Business in El Salvador**

Social Businesses or Social Enterprises are a recent and evolving trend which popularity is expanding rapidly. These organizations address basic unmet needs or solve social or environmental problems through a market-driven approach. (Social Enterprise Alliance, 2020) or as defined by the Nobel Peace Prize Muhammad Yunus they are non-dividend companies that are created to address and solve a social problem. As he states, in a social business, the investors can eventually recoup the money invested, but cannot take any dividends beyond that point. This is because the main motivator of the investment is the achievement of one or more social objectives through the operations of the company. The company must cover all costs and be financially sustainable, while also achieving the social objective in sectors such as healthcare, education, poverty, environment,

housing, climate urgency, etc. Once the original investment has been recouped by the investors, profit stays within the company to expand its outreach and increase its social impact. (Kickul et Al, 2012).

The approach that is being promoted by this model is promising since it is providing sustainable answers to social and environmental problems, therefore, it is important that Social Businesses are differentiated from non-profits/non-governmental organizations and from the Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives of traditional companies.

The concept of Social Business is not widely known in El Salvador. Partly because this is a recent trend that still continues to evolve in the rest of the world; it can also be because it often gets confused and, often reduced, to the current Social Responsibility Initiatives that are being carried out by companies in the country or because the country has not seen many initiatives like this. Hence, there is a need of educating population regarding social businesses and their proactive approach to social change, while CSR initiatives are reactive. Doing good is a permanent fixture of a social enterprise's business model. It is weaved into the corporation's fabric and is part of the organization's foundation. On the contrary, a CSR program is merely how corporations create positive social impact through their existing practices. (Workforce Opportunity Services, 2018)

Currently, there is just one company that has been registered as a social enterprise in El Salvador: IMPCT Coffee. This company was founded by the Salvadoran Andres Escobar, Juan Diego Prudot from Honduras, An-nung Chen and Jessi Fu from Taiwan. Together, they won the annual competition for Social Entrepreneurs known as Hult Prize back in 2015. They received seed funding which was used to start the business that sells coffee. The business is focused on commercializing coffee grains through coffee shops and online sales. The revenues are re invested in the business expansion and the transformation of low income and urban slum communities

through education. IMPCT directly sources products from those communities and invest the profits back into local women so they can run their preschools.

With their operations, IMPCT contributes to the Millennium Development Goal of providing quality education. Indirectly, it also promotes the objectives of ending poverty, zero hunger, gender equality, health and wellbeing, peace and reduction of inequities and economic growth. (IMPCT Coffee, 2020). The IMPCT Coffee initiative is recent, and it counts with two pre-schools and daycares that recently started operations in El Salvador successfully benefiting kids between 2 to 4 years and women in their communities.

Even when the concept is new in El Salvador, this can be a model that can be replicated and create it is promising when it comes to generating a positive impact. The foundations to build these types of businesses are already there since there is a growing interest in initiatives that benefit society and vulnerable groups. Also, the country counts with diverse sectors of the population that have been already trained in different areas and that are just waiting for employment opportunities so they can put their knowledge and experience to use. In many cases, this trained workforce is part of other initiatives such as the USAID Bridges to Employment Project funded by the United States Agency for International Development and the students of the Hogar La Rioja which will be reviewed in the next chapter.



### **3. Social Business as a pathway to Job Creation for people with disabilities in El Salvador**

Throughout the years, societies have commonly associated disability with religion and medical conditions. Luckily, this vision has expanded in recent years. As stated by the Social Model, disability is a “disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organization which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities” (Oliver,1990). In other words, disability is the result of the interaction between people with impairments and the attitudinal and physical barriers that exist in their surroundings. (United Nations, 2008).

This vision places responsibility on the framework and social organizations since most of these are not prepared for diversity which has resulted in disadvantages, segregation and lack of accessibility to resources for people that present different characteristics when compared to the average population. It is important that societies assume the responsibility of building an environment that is appropriate for people with disabilities, without attitudinal and physical barriers and where they can establish interpersonal relations and become a part of the social and economically active population. This environment must enable an effective and absolute participation in society and guarantee human rights. (Oliver,1990).

El Salvador is one of those societies that has made certain progress in the disability topic, however, there are still lots of areas of improvement and there is a need of addressing the barriers that affect people with disabilities in the country. Historically, El Salvador has seen this sector as mere subjects of charity that also lack human rights. This can be in part explained by previous models related to religion, where a disability was often considered as a punishment or as a result of a sin.

(J. Canizalez, personal communication, February 13, 2001) In other cases, disability was seen just as a medical condition presented just by few individuals, therefore, it was not a priority for society and the government to take actions that benefited just a reduced part of the population.

Nowadays, educating population and breaking attitudinal barriers still remain as one of the biggest challenges, particularly when this topic has been barely addressed in the government agendas. It is important that the Salvadoran society gives a step forward towards a more inclusive society and welcomes initiatives where inclusion is the predominant value. Since the topic of disability is still surrounded by prejudices and is not prioritized in the government portfolios and budgets is vital to pursue initiatives that are auto sustainable and that persist in time. New business models present themselves as a strong option and have many of the tools needed to establish themselves in El Salvador as strong competitors and as generators of new job positions in an economy where jobs are not plentiful.

### **3.1 Breaking the gap in El Salvador: Aimed benefits of Inclusion**

El Salvador has made advances when it comes to adopting international protocols and Conventions related to disability. It has also implemented local laws oriented to guarantee the rights of people with disabilities. Such are the cases of the Law of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities, the Tutorial for Labor Integration of People with Disabilities and the National Policy of Integral Attention for People with Disabilities.

As established in the 24th article of the Salvadoran Law of Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities, employers are required to hire at least one qualified person with disabilities per twenty-five employees without disabilities. In order to fill these positions, Human Resources

officers must send a list with vacancies to the Section of Vulnerable Groups where the vacancies will be matched with registered candidates. In order to be part of the Vulnerable Groups database managed by the government, people with disabilities must visit the designated government offices and register. In order to be part of the Candidates Database, postulants must present a Disability Certificate, which can be obtained at specific institutions appointed by the government.

This applies to all employers in the private and public sectors. As mentioned previously, the Law is also complemented with Sanctions established in the article 627 of the Salvadoran Labor Code that sets a penalty of up to fifty-seven US dollars and fourteen cents (\$57.14) per case. The total of the penalty is set according to the severity of the infraction. This sanction sets an important precedent since establishes a punishment for an obligation that is not being fulfilled. However, the penalty is not severe enough which causes that in many cases the employer chooses to pay the penalty without fulfilling its obligation of employing personnel with disabilities. This is mainly due to the persistent prejudices that consider people with disabilities as incapable of performing the job or that have low performance; because they assume that they do not have the required knowledge and experience or because they would have to adequate their facilities and make them accessible which would, in turn, represent an investment they are not willing to make or cannot make.

There has also been a tendency of the Salvadoran society regarding disability as an exclusive subject of charity denying the human rights that are inherent to every individual, such as access to employment and education, independently of individual characteristics. This engrained image of charity has been promoted and reinforced by media and national fundraisers such as ‘Teleton’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Institution created in 1987 to take care of people with disabilities (as a result of the civil war). It has evolved throughout the years and it is traditionally known for hosting a yearly fundraiser. The funds are then allocated to the

so it is no surprise that equal rights for people with disabilities and inclusion have not played a predominant role in the lives and interests of Salvadorans.

As studies and societies continue to advance, the benefits of inclusion are starting to become evident. In the case of El Salvador, it is imperative to set foundations that allow real and equal access to opportunities and recognize the positive impact that inclusion of people with disabilities, and all vulnerable groups, can have in the Salvadoran society. Some of the benefits can be described as follows:

- **Economic growth, productivity and employment:**

According to 87% of studies, there is a link between poverty and disability. Failure to address this bond could lead to stagnation in the progress towards economic growth and development. Therefore, investing in initiatives that break the disability-poverty cycle could lead to greater benefits in the long term for the whole country. Data is still limited; however, existing studies indicate high losses to GDP due to exclusion of people with disabilities from employment, they also show the positive impact in household economy and the increased acquisitive power when people with disabilities take part in the job market (Banks, L.M & Polack, S., 2015).

Additionally, there is evidence of the positive impact of inclusive growth approaches on reducing poverty and inequality, particularly when excluded groups gain greater access to education, employment and business opportunities. Emerging evidence of the positive relationship between diverse workforces and company profitability also exists (Carter, 2015). On the other hand, a report

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rehabilitation centers that provide services to people with different types of disabilities around the country (Teleton, 2020)

conducted by United Nations Development Program in 2013 showed how the persistent discrimination and inequality condition human development in the country.

- **Social cohesion, peace and state-building**

El Salvador has struggled for decades when it comes to social cohesion, peace and state building. This is partly due to historical reasons that generated inequality, weak institutions and poor social cohesion. These reasons include an unfair social system, a long civil war, corruption and historical lack of opportunities and class division; some of these factors still persist and, in many cases, lie behind the current problematics faced by the country. Research is vital in this area, particularly the studies that point to the positive relationship between peaceful societies and more inclusive states with state-society relations that are based on legitimacy rather than coercion resulting in greater associational life, trust and inter-group cohesion. Evidence suggests inclusive political settlements and broader political processes are essential for fostering peaceful societies (Carter, 2015).

- **Other Development areas:**

In-depth qualitative case studies show strong positive effect of efforts to make services more inclusive and also show improved progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), benefiting all society (Carter, 2015).

### **3.2 Successful cases of Social Business in other countries: Spain, The Republic of Korea and Singapore**

Social Businesses are a recent and growing trend that keeps on captivating customers around the world. This model has overcome frontiers and cultural gaps and continues to engage different audiences. Disability also transcends frontiers and cultures; therefore, it is no surprise that there are different initiatives around the world addressing this topic. These businesses aim to create more

opportunities for people with disabilities while educating the rest of the population in the topic and breaking the paradigms, stereotypes and barriers that have been reproduced from one generation to another.

The following businesses present successful and profitable models that can be taken as an example and replicated in other societies:

- **A la Par Foundation - Fundaland**

The A la Par Foundation started approximately seventy years ago as an institution that aided people with disabilities. The main goal of the Foundation is to provide employment opportunities. A la Par is a solid initiative that works for people with disabilities' rights. It has expanded successfully and now counts with several social businesses that generate earnings that are reinvested into the Foundation activities. Fundaland is one of these businesses and it consists of an accessible space where birthdays, parties and other types of gatherings can be hosted. Fundaland also offers workshops, extracurricular activities and camps that promote the values of the Foundation and the enterprise. It is located in Madrid, Spain and its workforce includes people with disabilities. A la Par Foundation also counts with the following social businesses that train and employ people with disabilities and reinvest their earnings to impact more people: Fuencarral Tennis and Paddle Tennis Club; Fundashop, Fundbar and an organic garden. A la Par also provides training and education through the programs Campus and A la Par School of Special Education, always with the final objective of incorporating people with disabilities into the economically active population (A La Par Foundation, 2020).

- **Library Cafe VOBISCUM:**

This Cafe is located inside the Korean Development Institute School in Sejong City, South Korea. This Cafe is an opportunity that has allowed five people with disabilities to accomplish their goal

of becoming financially independent (KDI School, 2020). This initiative is an important example of inclusion, particularly in a competitive society like the Korean, where knowledge and training are advanced and where competition for jobs is fierce.

The Cafe VOBISCUM is classified by the school as a Social Responsibility initiative, however, it is a perfect example that can be replicated by Social Businesses around the world since it constitutes a space where people with disabilities and people without disabilities come together in an understanding environment that enhances communication and breaks common disability stereotypes (KDI School, 2020).

VOBISCUM is also an example of the significant impact that can be produced when different actors of society come together and work towards a common goal. One of its partners is the Granada Disabled sheltered Workshop, an occupational rehabilitation facility that is managed by the Social Welfare Foundation of St. John Welfare society. There, children are provided with rehabilitation treatments aligned with their developmental process to help them overcome their disabilities in order for them to access various opportunities that allow them to adjust to society and become valuable members and active participants in the community. This business focuses on intellectually disabled adults and autistic disorders. Its main business includes café, mail forwarding, processing and other occupational rehabilitation (Social Welfare Society, Inc., 2020)

- **Dignity Kitchen**

This social venture was founded by Koh Seng Choon in 2010 and it is located in Singapore. Its main focus is providing educational and employment opportunities in the food services industry to vulnerable groups, including those with physical, intellectual and mental disabilities. They also employ and train ex-offenders, youth at risk, domestic violence victims, cancer and stroke

survivors and any other person in need. The founder wanted to create a commercially sustainable business with a robust social mission that does not rely on charity to survive. While social purpose is at the core of the initiative, every aspect in the operations process was designed to create a sustainable business where all profits are reinvested into the social mission.

So far, Dignity Kitchen has trained and successfully placed more than 500 mentally or physically challenged students, has seen more than 4,500 people graduate from its courses, and has incubated over 33 food stalls. The social enterprise has engaged over 52,000 elderly people through its lunch and outreach program and has worked with over 100 schools to gain exposure. Dignity Kitchen prides itself on a 100% placement rate of its disabled trainees. Graduates normally find jobs in food stalls, cafes, restaurants and hotels, some others have started their own business, and the ones that cannot find a job are normally employed by Dignity Kitchen. (Dignity Kitchen, 2020)

### **3.3 Social Business, a Potential Employment Opportunity for People with Disabilities in El Salvador: Case of Trainees from Hogar La Rioja**

Parallel to strong government actions and policies, the implementation of employment initiatives that promote an inclusive approach within the Salvadoran society is viable and needed. The country has made progress by adopting international instruments and creating its own legal framework that addresses disability and promotes employment of people with disabilities. As any legal framework, the existing instruments and institutions can still be strengthened and need to be kept up to date in order to respond to the evolving needs, challenges and barriers presented by society and disability.

It is true that government plays the lead role in establishing, promoting and enforcing inclusive values and is important to recognize its primary responsibility of guaranteeing access to opportunities and fulfillment of human rights; however, involvement of all sectors is also needed



to accomplish the real and sought-after inclusive society. So far, Salvadoran society has played a passive role when it comes to disability but is important to acknowledge that entrepreneurs, employers, business owners and people in leadership positions can help deconstruct taboos and stereotypes that surround disability by recognizing the qualifications of these people and guaranteeing inclusive employment opportunities.

In this context, Social businesses position themselves as a feasible alternative. As previously mentioned, Social Businesses address unmet needs and solve problematics through a market driven approach (Social Enterprise Alliance, 2020). Is this approach what makes them sustainable and competitive. This is a recent trend and its popularity continues to expand and create impact around the world. In this business model, social awareness and willingness to create a positive impact in the specific society where the business operates are key as well as other factors such as available and qualified human capital and investors.

As a result of multiple efforts performed by private institutions, the government, families and other actors, El Salvador already counts with people with disabilities that are trained in different areas and that are waiting for a job opportunity. The most pressing action is to generate those opportunities and incorporate those people in the economically active population. The exemplary and inspiring case of La Rioja Home (Hogar La Rioja in Spanish) will be reviewed in this document as well as its potential to contribute to the establishment of Social Businesses in the country.

### **History of La Rioja**

(V. Zaldaña, personal communication, July 1, 2019)

La Rioja Home is a non-governmental and non-profit organization that focuses on providing education and training to young people and adults with intellectual disability. Their mission is to

rehabilitate them by strengthening their capabilities through support and application of multidisciplinary programs. This home started as a response to the limited education and training offer that has been provided throughout the years to people with disabilities in in El Salvador and it is a product of joint work between parents and altruists. The donations perceived by the house are used to pay the salaries of the professors, instructors and administrative personnel. The programs that are offered by this organization include:

**Recreational training:** The organization works to strengthen the fine and gross motor skills through physical exercise, sports and various tasks that are designed to provide the students with self-esteem, self-discipline and confidence in their abilities.

**Academic Programs:** La Rioja counts with facilities that allow the development of gross motor skills and it also counts with an area of technological resources where students can strengthen their cognitive skills.

**Vocational training:** The organization also provides training in bakery, sewing, carpentry, horticulture and crafts. On the first phase students learn work habits and the different stages that constitute a productive chain. During the second phase, the students are assigned to specific productive areas that fit their skills and training. These students are employed internally. The most qualified students become candidates for possible external employment however the job offer varies from limited to nonexistent.

#### **Looking into the future: Social businesses**

La Rioja counts with over fifteen years of experience in working with people with disabilities. Throughout that period of time they have been able to train multiple candidates that suit multiple job descriptions around the country. However, these candidates have not been given employment opportunities by external employers. According to its Director, Vilma Zaldaña, when interviewed

on July 2019 only three people trained by the organization had obtained an external job. This is mainly due to the perception that still remains in society about people with disabilities. They are seen as incapable of performing a job, often they are not considered as subjects of rights and some other times, even if they get a job, transportation limitations and architectonic barriers make it almost impossible for them to accept a job offer. Also, job offers for people with disabilities are often limited to those that do not have high knowledge or experience requirements event though many candidates have completed higher education. Still, they get often discriminated due to their disability and lose to other competitors that have similar qualification but that do not have a disability, which means the company does not need accessible spaces and equipment or sensitized personnel with knowledge in the topic.

The aforementioned barriers that limit people with disabilities' access to employment are reinforced by the lack of follow up and attention provided by authorities to the existent legal instruments, by the scarce resources and investments in this area and by the weak political will. Therefore, is important for organizations to look for alternatives that generate funds and allow them to finance their activities and, as an ultimate goal, impact more people. La Rioja, already counts with trained personnel that can easily be incorporated in a food services business. The example of the South Korean VOBISCUM could be replicated in the country since the students can also prepare pastries and are trained to work in the area.

Social Businesses are a recent trend and it would be an innovation in El Salvador. However, these are the innovations that can help the country give a step forward, particularly, because it would open a possibility for people with disabilities to become active members of society; it would constitute an interactive space that weakens discrimination and segregation, breaks stereotypes and

misconceptions and proves that people with disabilities are valuable employees that perform a high quality job.

This type of Social Business would also bring emphasis on the disability topic, in the need of public spaces that are inclusive and where all members of society can participate and would certainly set a standard where people with disabilities' needs and rights are met: it would open employment opportunities, it would allow them to become financially independent and it would contribute to an inclusive society.

The Salvadoran Government traditionally promotes entrepreneurship in El Salvador, so investing or providing seed capital for a project like this is a possibility. The competitive nature and auto sustainability of social businesses make them a feasible venture since if implemented adequately, the business can maintain itself and generate profits that will later be reinvested to impact more people.

## **Conclusions**

People with disabilities have to endure different types of barriers throughout their lives. In the case of El Salvador, one of the most persistent barriers and the main responsible for keeping people with disabilities from accessing to employment is the psychological barrier. Employers and the rest of society hardly ever trust in the capabilities, knowledge and skills of people with disabilities, mainly due to stereotypes, taboos and misconceptions. In addition, the predominant attitude towards disability has been reinforced by the lack of knowledge and sensibilization in the topic and by scarce and weak public policies. The psychological barriers are only part of the situation that is endured by persons with disabilities since the country still has a lot to do when it comes to overcoming transportation, urban, architectural and communicational barriers. There has been some progress especially with the adoption of legal instruments, however, disability tends to evolve and the progress and advances that have been made have been slow, in some cases superficial and, therefore, have not reached all sectors of society resulting in a limited impact and unfulfilled human rights.

The situation described above has influenced the overall quality of life of people with disabilities and their close ones and has prevented them, in many cases, from being active members of society. In some other cases, people with disabilities have been only able to participate in some spheres but have not been able to fully enjoy their rights and integrate completely to the Salvadoran society. In this sense, it is important that the government and other sectors of society assume their responsibilities and an active role when it comes to disability.

El Salvador already counts with some initiatives that promote inclusion, but they have not been able to impact all the persons with disabilities. Since the resources invested in addressing disability are limited, it is important to look for initiatives that are auto sustainable, competitive and that can

use the existing skills and training, such as social enterprises, which would not be complete strangers to the government and Salvadorans since entrepreneurship initiatives are traditionally encouraged. Additionally, institutions like La Rioja represent an opportunity area since they already count with personnel that is ready to take on job opportunities, also there are professionals with disabilities that have concluded their studies and are only waiting to get an employment opportunity.

## **Policy Recommendations**

Building an inclusive society requires an active leadership of the government and the involvement of the different sectors of society. Therefore, it is important to work in the following areas:

### **Government Plans and Budget:**

There is an urgent need for the central and local governments to prioritize and take the lead on the field of disability. This area should be included in their government plans and contain concrete and achievable short, medium- and long-term goals. These plans should be permanent and sustainable. The government should also seek advisory services from experts in the field and open spaces for participation to people with disabilities, so the plans respond to the reality of this sector. Timelines, objectives and indicators should also be defined in a clear and concise way in order to avoid previous mistakes, where follow up is not being provided, there is slow and few progress and there is no clear idea of when or what objectives should be achieved. There is also a need of promoting accountability to ensure that the objectives are met in reasonable periods of time. A proper follow up is also needed in order to make changes and improvements when necessary.

Public Institutions should also be actively supported by the Government. This should plan and assign a specific budget that allows institutions to make the adjustments needed, hire qualified personnel, abide by the law and guarantee human rights. It is also recommended for the Government to request International Cooperation for the area of disability. Particularly financial (refundable and non-refundable), technical, scientific and technological.

**Legal:**

El Salvador already counts with some legal instruments that address the topic of disability. However, these instruments are outdated, are too general and do not respond to the current situation. The following improvements are recommended:

Law of Equal Opportunities, Labor Code and new sanctions and protocols: First of all, it is important that the Ministry of Labor, Ministry of Economy and other pertinent institutions generate a record that shows how many companies are complying with the Law and hiring people with disabilities. This record should also include a strict control of the penalties that have been imposed and that guarantees that the sanctioned companies are paying for each fine. There should be a designated individual or institution in charge of following up properly, enforcing the law and providing periodical and public reports on this topic. Also, this should be complemented with other tools that favor access to information, particularly when it comes to employment opportunities.

It is also important to modify the sanction contained in this law. The penalty of \$57.14, if the highest amount is applied, has proved to be ineffective since there are companies that still choose to pay the fine due to the amount being too low. An example of a stronger sanction could be the company paying the equivalent of 12 to 24 minimum wages or more, depending on the sanction and incidence. Moreover, there is a need of implementing new protocols and sanctions that guarantee that job places are accessible, that the jobs that are being offered are adequate and that the recruitment process is fair and free of discriminatory practices.

Law of Inclusion: this law has been already proposed to the pertinent authorities, however, there has not been much progress. It is important that this law is evaluated, approved and implemented in El Salvador since it provides a legal back up that benefits the fulfilment of human rights, and is



not limited to the employment field. Once it is implemented it is important that the authorities and institutions are prepared to execute it, enforce it and follow up properly. It is also important that society knows and understands this law in order for it to be effective.

New laws or protocols: There is a need of creating new regulatory procedures and instruments. These instruments must have binding effects and must ensure that society abides by law. Some of the areas that need to be regulated are the following: hospitals, schools and all public institutions must count with at least 2 interpreters and accessible facilities (ramps, elevators, braille materials, proper signage, etc.); accessibility in private businesses, institutions and public spaces; transportation units need to be renovated so they are accessible to all public; education curricula needs to be inclusive; public events should be accessible to everyone, etc.

#### **Conscientization and Inclusive Education:**

It is recommended that the Government implements a permanent conscientization plan in order for society to know and understand disability. Conscientization campaigns are recommended and these should be open and accessible to all public and conducted on a national level.

The Ministry of Education should also modify its curricula by including sensitization topics about disability and making sure all the contents in class are accessible and staff is properly trained so students with disabilities can attend regular schools and avoid segregation or over population on the special education centers.

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## **Annex**

### **Interview with Julio Canizalez who works at La Casa del Ciego (Cultural House for The Blind)**

1. Tell us about the Cultural House for The Blind. What were the motivations behind this project? How did it start? The Cultural House started because the Salvadoran Association for The Blind started a project denominated "Documentation center for the blind" which was financed for a period of two years. However, after those two years, funding was insufficient, and it wasn't permanent, so the General Assembly decided that we needed to pursue a partnership with the Culture and Art Council. We proposed the creation of a cultural house for blind people and the idea was widely accepted. We inaugurated the House on February 26, 1998. In the alliance, it was established that the House would use resources from the Blind Association (ASCES) until it started generating its own funds. We continued working together in this partnership and in 2012 the ASCES obtained its own property.

Since the House started, it has been a space where blind people can meet, participate in the House activities and develop activities of their own interest. These activities include cultural actions, rights, participation, arts, and commemorative resources, all of these open to all community and where institutions meet in some occasions.

2. Tell us a little about the House of the blind, what was the motivation behind this project? How did the Project start? The House for the Blind started when the Association for the Blind earned a project denominated "Documentation Center for the Blind" which they were able to sustain for two years, however, since they did not count with permanent funding the board decided that they needed to look for an alliance with the Culture and Art Council. They proposed the idea of creating a cultural house for the blind people and the idea was well received so the House was inaugurated on February 26, 1998. The alliance established that the House could use funds from the Association of the Blind until they started generating their own resources.

Since the Cultural House started, it has been a space where blind people get together, develop activities of their interest and participate of the activities organized by the House. These activities cover matters related to culture, human rights, participation, artistic education, typhological aspects and commemorations that are open to all the community. There is also space to host institutional meetings.

3. In the Association for the Blind website, there is a mention of the minimum budget and it also refers to self-management. What do you mean when you refer to self-management? Do you receive any economic support from the Government or other institutions? The Salvadoran Association for the Blind, ASCES for its Spanish acronym, works with service projects that include signage, Braille transcription and massage clinics; however, the money generated from these activities only covers the salaries of the project executors, the payment of the utility bills, internet, phone and

cleaning services. ASCES does not count with any economic support from the Government unless they are executing a project for them.

Self-management refers to all those activities that are organized in order to generate funds for trainings, business ventures and procurement of equipment needed for the correct functioning of the institution. It is increasingly difficult to gain support from the private sector, since there is a lot of competition for funds, so when we approach the private institutions we often receive a rejection as a response to our request since they have already collaborated with another institution that counts with known personalities (but that does not necessarily work for vulnerable groups).

The Cultural House is a unit that belongs to the Ministry of Culture. The House counts with two employees, the Ministry pays the utilities and rent. We also have a Budget for cleaning and office supplies, some trainings, transportation and refreshments for cultural visits. This Budget is very limited, therefore we need to fundraise so we can organize more activities and provide more support to the community, particularly because we are the only House for the blind in the country so we try to receive people from all the national territory. However, due to the limited budget is hard for us to reach all the blind people, especially those that live far from the capital.

4. What are the types of activities organized by the House of Blind? Can you tell us an approximate number of the participants? Do you consider that the Salvadoran population knows or is interested in participating in the activities of the House for the Blind? We organize discussions, commemoration of cultural days, typhlological courses, art contests, panels, human rights workshops, site visits to cultural sites, and others.

The number of participants varies. Normally the average is 40 participants. There are at least ten activities per year where we get more than 100 participants.

People that know about the Cultural House for the Blind are the ones that are close to our community. Most blind people know about us. When it comes to the rest of society, they are not really interested in the topic of disability. There is also an obstacle that prevents blind people from participating in our events and is that blind people are normally self-employed, since formal jobs for people with visual disability are scarce.

5. What are the biggest challenged that are faced by the Cultural house for the Blind and other similar projects? For the Cultural House for the Blind, one of the biggest challenges is counting with people that support the cultural side as a promotor and workshop tutor. We also require someone that works with digital projects and Braille impression so we can have literary texts.

Also, having enough economic resourced or funds for artistic or typhlological projects would help us attract more people. So far, due to the resources we have, we plan around fixed schedules that do not work for people due to their academic responsibilities.

I believe that other institutions might have similar funding problems, mainly when it comes to training and institutional operations.

6. Are there enough inclusive initiatives directed to people with visual disability in El Salvador? No. The topic of disability is not seen as a subject of rights yet and is normally viewed as charity. Like we are helping people with disabilities. There is no consideration of people with disabilities' rights. There is no interest in closing the gap between lack of urban and architectonic accessibility, or improving the access to communication, transportation, accessible texts or accessible cultural spaces.

7. In your opinion, what is the biggest barrier (or barriers) that are faced by people with disabilities in El Salvador? Why do you think these barriers exist? And how do you think these barriers can be overcome or reduced? Maybe the biggest barrier is the attitude or mindset and the lack of an inclusive culture. When people don't know something they fear it. And on top of that fear is the lack of information about disability, about the limits but mainly about the capabilities that we have to be an active part of society. This generates discrimination or non-voluntary segregation that damages people with disabilities, mainly during their childhood.

The implementation of free programs directed to people with disabilities, with proper methodologies and tools that foster the adequate learning and improve accessibility are some of the things that could close the opportunity gap between people with disabilities and the rest of society and could also benefit peaceful coexistence.

8. Which has been the biggest barrier that you have experienced when studying, starting a business or applying to jobs? Lack of customized material (technical and bibliographic) for people with visual disability and the lack of knowledge about disabilities that the professors have are the biggest barriers I've encountered.

When it comes to employment, the lack of knowledge about disability and the strong expectations that employers have for a person to multi-task. Sometimes recruiters think that when a person has a disability then the multitasking assignment will be affected or that they will need to incur in a lot of changes to the job description or to the facilities, therefore, there are few opportunities.

9. How would you rate CONAIPDs and the Government's performance when it comes to disability? What can be improved? Sadly, these past four years CONAIPD has not incorporated actions that benefit people with disabilities. They do not have autonomy to work in this topic and due to the bureaucracy, no results have been generated.

The current Government has been in office for a few months and so far there are no clear lines of action but the points that were advertised during the electoral campaign. We have to wait and see what they do.

Training people with disabilities is extremely urgent in order to highlight the topic in different sectors and ministry's agendas. It is also urgent to position people with disabilities in different areas of civil society to break stereotypes and start changing the way people with disabilities are perceived. This would open a space for the rest of society to work with us for inclusion, something that would benefit all at the end, since as we grow old, we are more susceptible to disabilities.

10. What do you think is the most urgent policy that should be implemented by the Government in order to guarantee the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities? The implementation of a real policy for participation and training directed to people with disabilities together with a funds allocation in each state portfolio that's specially reserved for the implementation of said programs and initiatives that protect the rights of people with disabilities.

11. From your perspective, why is there such a big educational gap between people with disabilities and people that don't have disabilities? What can be improved or done by the Government and Ministry of Education to minimize this gap? Updating the school's curriculum in a way that equips the professors with appropriate teaching techniques for students with disabilities, the creation of a mandatory program regarding disability for professors, the elimination of urban-architectonic barriers in the education centers and equipping the schools and students with specialized resources would be an ideal and effective way of reducing and eventually eliminating the gap.

12. What do you think about the labor market for people with visual impairment or any other type of disability? Do you think it is enough? What could be better? There is no job market for people with disabilities. It is necessary that the Ministry of Labor counts with personnel that's knowledgeable in the topic of disability so they can convince future employers of giving an opportunity to people with disabilities and so they can guide them in the process of making reasonable adjustments that allow people with disabilities to perform well.

13. How would you evaluate the role of society when it comes to disability? Do you think there is discrimination or indifference? How could the Salvadoran Society contribute to the guarantee of rights and the improvement of the life quality of people with disabilities? Is it completely passive, there is a lack of interest and sometimes there is discrimination, particularly, due to stereotypes, inherited prejudices or lack of knowledge about the abilities and capacities of people with disabilities. If there was awareness or an inclusive culture maybe we'd have a harmonious coexistence and we would have more social, Laboral and educational opportunities.

I think that we need to generate programs that create awareness about disabilities.

14. In your opinion, what would be the biggest challenge for a social Enterprise where most of its staff has a disability? (coffee shop, restaurant, etc.) do you think that this business would be welcome by the Salvadoran population? I think it is possible. Also, other businesses that offer

services such as laundering, manufacturing of canes, mattresses and bed linens could be a business opportunity for employment of people with disabilities. The key is the support from the government and obtaining funds to start these businesses.

### **Interview with Jaime Villalta who created the blog “From my Wheelchair”.**

1. What do you think is the role of society when it comes to disability? There are a lot of deficiencies when it comes to the psychological part, infrastructure, employment, etc. and without working in these areas there is no way that we can decrease the gap between people with and without disabilities. Society should play a more active role and learn about disability, understand what the real concept of disability is, that is not right to call us “sick, crazy, etc.”. Or also, just by calling us by our names and not referring to us as the persons with disability. That is a sign of inclusion since people are seeing beyond the disability and they are acknowledging us as persons.

2. Do you consider that there are enough inclusion initiatives for people with disabilities in El Salvador? When it comes to public institutions there are not enough initiatives. Laws are not being implemented properly and the Legislative Assembly is not making any progress in the field. So, as people with disabilities, we have to work from our own realities and spaces so other people learn about disability and our rights and, therefore, minimize exclusion. I do it from my blog, there is also a youtuber that has a hearing disability. From her blog she educates people on what is a disability, her abilities and how she can live a normal life as long as her rights are respected. We all put a lot of effort in awareness initiatives to make up for the work that other institutions are not doing.

3. What motivated you to start your blog? The lack of knowledge that people has regarding disability. Even on the internet, there is not much information about the topic. It was also a result of an investigation I was conducting at university and since I couldn’t find much information, I realized it was necessary to put it out there so people can learn about it.

4. What has been your experience regarding school, higher education and other institutions? This is one of the spaces where discrimination is more tangible. Discrimination starts from the authorities of the institutions. There is no accessibility in the buildings and the infrastructure is not adequate for people with disabilities so that’s an indirect way of telling students with a disability that the institution is not ready for them or to accommodate any need they might have. That shouldn’t be the message that educational institutions are spreading since you are denying the right of access to education. My personal experience regarding this has been really hard, since the building where I receive my classes doesn’t have a ramp nor elevator and my classes are on the second or third floor. Normally I’ve had good classmates that have always helped me but that is not the ideal situation. School authorities help me with changing some of my classes, however the mobility challenge in the facilities remains. Sometimes it makes me not want to continue studying but it has also motivated me to continue working.



5. Would you consider the Salvadoran society as inclusive? There have been some improvements in the topic of disability. However, I would classify it as regular. As society, we still have the idea of classifying people according to defects or looks. There are still institutions and employers that turn down students or potential employees just because they have a disability. Transportation is not accessible so there is still a lot of work to do and improvements to make to be considered as an inclusive society. This is because our laws are outdated. There is no back up for people with disabilities and without it the rest of society won't take us seriously.

6. What do you think of the legal instruments that El Salvador has adopted regarding disability? As I mentioned previously, these instruments are outdated. Also, there is no follow up of said instruments. The Ministry of Labor doesn't have accurate data that allows them to control how many employees with disabilities are hired per company for example. Every aspect needs to be worked on education, inclusive recreational areas, accessibility employment, transportation, etc. Since all of these aspects have deficiencies, I can't say that the rights of people with disabilities are fulfilled.

7. What are the barriers that you face on your day to day? For me, the main barriers are architectonic and infrastructural. Particularly when I attend my classes. The building and the campus are not accessible. When it comes to my classmates, I've haven't had problems so far. My classmates have been good to me and I don't feel any rejection.

8. Why do you think these barriers exist? The answer is simple. Is due to people's mentality. Disability doesn't mean the person is sick. Disability is everything in the environment that prevents a person with certain deficiency to have a normal life. The lack of accessibility in the buildings or adequate signs, social barriers, etc. it is important for people to understand that we can have a normal life as long as our rights are respected.

9. How can people contribute to the topic of disability? By getting actively involved. People can participate and support our activities, learn about disability, listen to our experiences so they understand our situation. That's the task they have.

10. in one of your articles, you mention that disability is still a taboo in the country. What made you reach this conclusion? The existing deficiencies that are in the country. Lack of accessible public transportation, that there are people that have kids with disabilities, and they hide them from society, some others still think that a disability is a punishment from God, etc. There is no knowledge about it, so people just assume that a person with disabilities cant study, fall in love, get a job or even interact with their own families; due to all of this beliefs people don't talk openly about the topic so that is why is still a taboo.

11. How was your experience while studying basic education? I went to public and private institutions and I had different experiences. In the public school, during the 2001 earthquakes I was not evacuated. Everyone went out of the classroom and left me there, not even the professor helped me evacuate. I did not experience bullying, but I do understand that is the reality that other

people with disabilities live. I did suffer bullying and rejection in the private school, it was during my adolescence and that's normally when we tend to be mean to others because of the way they look, and I was there in my wheelchair.

12. Do you think El Salvador is prepared to handle the topic of disability? I think is not prepared. Its institutions are not prepared, its professors, the government, etc. There is still this idea of simply not taking care of people with disabilities. Let's take the infrastructure example again. Places are not prepared for people with disabilities. There are no signs or people that know sign language, there are no braille materials, in some cases people are asked to bring interpreters with them if they want to go to class or they have to go to a special education center. This is not right since this creates segregation and prevents people from interacting with the rest of society.

13. What do you think are the main barriers for people with disabilities? When it comes to education, I'd say is infrastructure since institutions are not accessible. Also, institutions are not prepared with interpreters or braille materials. When it comes to employment, I think is infrastructure too because businesses have to adequate its facilities. Another barrier is that, sometimes, businesses don't hire people with disabilities due to their capabilities. They just do it to comply with the law so there isn't a real opportunity. There are many people with disabilities that have university degrees, however, companies just want to hire them for cleaning tasks, etc.

14. Do you think there are enough employment opportunities for people with disabilities? I do not think there are enough employment opportunities. As mentioned previously, there are a lot of capable and well-prepared potential employees that are ready to take up on jobs, however the opportunity is not giving just because there is certain disability. Sadly, the job offers are normally limited to security guard jobs or to cleaning services. There are some institutions that give opportunities, I work at a private higher education center and they accommodated everything in order for it to be accessible. Also, I know of other enterprises that are prepared to receive employees with hearing disability. However, there is still a lot of discrimination, and normally if someone has a disability, is not normally hired because employers still believe that they wont be able to perform well in the job.

15. How would you evaluate the job market for people with disabilities? I would say is deficient. There is a lack of job offers, companies do not normally hire people with disabilities and some of them even rather paying the penalty than hiring people with disabilities.

16. What are some recommendations to build an inclusive job market? First of all, overcome that idea that if someone has a disability, he or she can only perform cleaning tasks. Also, be more objective when analyzing the curriculum vitae and hiring according to knowledge and not based on a existence or nonexistence of a disability. Also, for employers, its important that they make sure they have accessible facilities.

## **Interview with Vilma Zaldaña, Director of La Rioja.**

1. Can you tell me a little about La Rioja? Can you explain us a little about the education for people with disabilities in El Salvador? Do you receive any type of support from the Government? In El Salvador, the schools for special education only focus on reading and writing. But why? This is because the Ministry of Education only provide funds for schools. Special education is not included in the plans or curriculum, therefore, there are a lot of skills that are not being taught.

There are only 30 schools for special education in the whole territory which means like 1 or 2 per department. As mentioned previously, they manly teach students how to read and write. One of the objectives of La Rioja is to teach and enhance abilities and autonomy so our students can find a job. We provide pre-labor education and prepare our students on occupational abilities, gardening, handicrafts, cooking, arts, technology, carpentry, bakery and sewing. We use a learn by doing approach. Our students also receive regular classes such as math, language, social studies. Etc. and they attend school the whole year.

The Ministry of Education has a new vision towards a more inclusive education. La Rioja, for being considered as an implementer school, receives support from the Government which equals to less than 1 million USD.

2. Do you know if any of the students of la Rioja has got a job? So far, 3 of our students have got a job. It is important to consider that the topic of disability is evolving continuously, and it takes diversity as a starting point validating that we all have different abilities. There is still an idea that promoted the over protection of people with disabilities. They are not seen as subject of rights or as empowered individuals and in many cases, their families are the ones that are not letting them work.

3. Do you think the Law of Equal Opportunities has been effective? Why? Businesses don't comply with the Law of Equal opportunities. They are not prepared nor sensitized in the topic. Some of them prefer to pay the penalties than giving an employment opportunity to a person with a disability. There are some businesses that have evolved and have looked for a way of providing support or work together.

One of the reasons why the Law of Equal Opportunities has not been effective is because sanctions are unfair and soft. Law should be stronger, for example, businesses that don't comply with the law should pay a penalty that equals to the minimum salary that a person should receive in a 2 year period. Another problem are the poor records that are available. Who is complying with the law? How many employees with disabilities does each nosiness have? How many people with disabilities has each business hired in the last years? All this information is not being registered, there is no follow up. Also, there aren't concrete policy actions or guidelines to enforce the law since this is not regarded as a priority by the government. There is also a lack of sensitization in the topic, society is not aware that people with disabilities have rights, therefore, a positive action has to be generated and this can happen by enforcing the law and imposing penalties.

Conscientization is everyone's responsibility. The State should do it, the government, the citizens, is our responsibility to be aware of the situation that our population faces.

4. What are some actions that could be taken in order to increase the available opportunities for people with disabilities in the country? How could the Government of El Salvador and other sectors improve the work they are performing in the disability field?

There is a need of deep changes. But the thought of people with disabilities being not equal to the rest is engrained in Salvadoran society. For example, the article 74 of the Constitution of El Salvador refers to people with psycho-social disability with a discriminatory term that can be interpreted as retarded. Discrimination is everywhere.

There is a need for the political sector of the country to conscientize, create public policies, campaigns, concrete actions and other initiatives that improve the quality of life and fulfil the rights of people with disabilities in the country.

The Legislative Assembly should also get involved by making sure that laws are not discriminatory and that laws potentiate employment for people with disabilities. There has been progress, but it has been slow and still there is a lot of improvement that needs to be done. A Law for Inclusion could substitute the Law for Equal Opportunities and be a tool that improves the situation of people with disabilities however, there is not political will to approve it.

The topic of disability has not been a priority to politicians and has not been a priority in the Social Protection Programs. There is no political will to work in this area, no strong laws and there is few information about the situation of disability in the country.

5. What are other barriers that people with disabilities encounter? How does this impact them? There is a low access to the education system, and this results in higher levels of analphabetism in people with disabilities. These also impacts their opportunities, and, in most cases, they have completely abandoned the idea of getting a job opportunity. Is also common for people with disabilities to work with their families (with no remuneration), to be under employed, become subjects of forced begging or in case of the girls, have to do all the domestic chores.

6. What would you say is the main barrier that is faced by people with disabilities? When it comes to barriers, I would say one of the main ones is stigma. People see people with disabilities as subjects of pity, asexual people, second class people, etc. There is a need of implementing public policies that favor awareness and sensitization in the topic.

7. What do you think would be the biggest challenge that a Social Business operated by people with disabilities would face in El Salvador? I would say that it would be the social barrier. Overcoming the stigma that surrounds people with disabilities since people think that they can't do things or work but in reality, people with disabilities are perfectly capable of being independent and performing a good quality job when trained for it. Besides that, I don't see why the business wouldn't be successful. It is important, though, to be careful with segregation. Because to achieve

real inclusion people with disabilities should have the opportunity of working with diverse teams that have people with and with no disabilities. They should not be confined to working exclusively with other people with disabilities.