

LESSON LEARNED  
ON EMPOWERING SELF-ADVOCATES  
WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES



**IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The ESCAP-APCD Partnership Project

**“Improving Self-Reliance of Self-Advocates  
with Intellectual Disabilities and their  
Families in Thailand”**



## BASIC INFORMATION

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the well-being of persons with disabilities in Thailand. Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) face additional difficulties in accessing quality food and nutrition, as well as undertaking regular physical exercises. They also have limited skills in advocating for their own needs and living independently in the context of the pandemic.

In this context, through close collaboration among three parties, self-advocates with ID, their parents and family members, as well as supporters (Triangle Collaboration Strategy or in short TCS), ACPD seeks to empower persons with ID so that they can regain their confidence to lead healthy, food-secured and independent lives during the pandemic and beyond.

**Project title:** Improving Self-reliance of Self-advocates with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and their Families in Thailand

**Objective:** To improve the quality of life for persons with ID in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Thailand.

**Outputs:** A comprehensive capacity development program to equip persons with ID with the requisite skills to lead healthy, food-secured, and independent lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

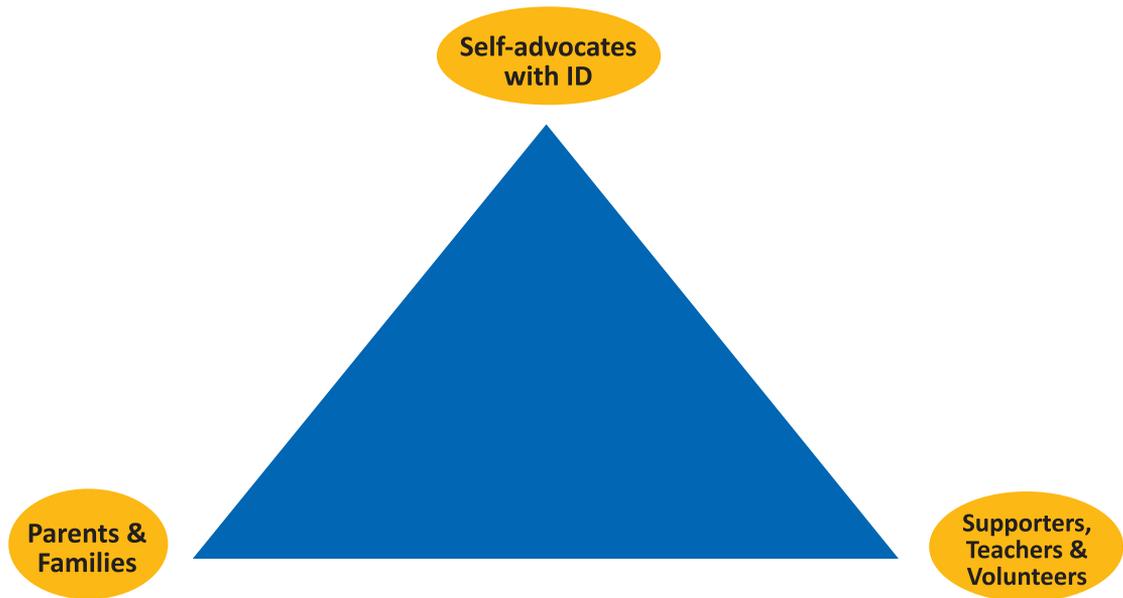
**Target groups:** Three self-advocate groups of persons with ID consisting of Dao Ruang (Marigold) Group in Bangkok, Healing Family Foundation, and Dulabhatorn Foundation in Chiang Mai Province.

**Implementation Agency:** Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD)

**Location:** Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Lamphun and Pathum Thani Province, Thailand

**Duration:** February 2021 - May 2022

**Partners:** The Golden Jubilee Museum of Agriculture (Public Organization), House of Hope Foundation, Tawanchai Foundation, Foundation of Children with Disabilities, BlueDot Partnerships Co., Ltd., United ID Network Mekong Sub-region, the Association of Parents of Person with Intelligences Disability of Thailand and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities



**Remarks:** Triangle Collaboration Strategy (TCS) is an approach developed from APCD's good practice on empowering self-advocates with ID. TCS approach considers that the collaboration among the 3 main partners, self-advocates (as key sector), parents or family members and supporters (teachers, staff of organizations) should work together to promote quality of life of persons with ID.

## OVERVIEW ACTIVITIES

- 1) Select participants for the capacity development program, with particular efforts to identify women with intellectual disabilities.
- 2) Conduct monthly online meetings with participants and resource persons.
- 3) Field survey for the ESCAP-APCD Partnership Project capacity development workshops in Nakhon Nayok, Pathum Thani Province on March 11, 2022, and Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai Province on March 16–18, 2022.
- 4) Prepare content and arrange logistics for delivery of capacity development workshops.
- 5) Conduct training workshop I in Lamphun Province (5 – 11 April 2022).
- 6) Conduct training workshop II in Pathum Thani (3 – 8 May 2022).
- 7) Coordination with relevant government entities, private sector bodies, foundations and other organizations to obtain potential grants to support participants in sustaining their crop-growing activities.
- 8) Organize on-site follow-up workshop with resource persons.
- 9) Develop report and advocacy materials documenting good practices and lessons learned through the capacity development program.
- 10) Print and distribute report and advocacy materials.
- 11) Organize online meeting to share experiences with stakeholders.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

- 1) Two firsthand knowledge training programs were able to enhance capacity of persons with intellectual disabilities to lead healthy, food-secure, and independent lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic
- 2) The Triangle Collaboration Strategy (collaboration among 3 parties, self-advocates with ID, family members, and supporters (teachers, coaches) is essential for empowering participants, especially women with intellectual disabilities and divorced mothers. It also encouraged them to mobilize various resources they find during each practical workshop. As such, they regained their confidence and collaborated with external resource persons to achieve training objectives.
- 3) Participants were inspired to demonstrate the necessary skills to lead healthy, food-secure, and self-sufficient lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic by role models who have physical disabilities.
- 4) Through the “ID’s voice must be heard” recommendations, self-advocates with ID and their families had the courage to communicate to society their desires to work with partners, and enhanced networking and collaboration for their future concerns.
- 5) The project fully promoted the key international instruments which include Incheon Strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Concrete activities were designed to implemented according to the objectives.

## LESSON LEARNED

- 1) A successful approach to empowering persons with intellectual disabilities has been encouraging via TCS approach among self-advocates with intellectual disabilities, their family members, and supporters. As a result of this project, persons with ID are better integrated into their communities and are better equipped to take charge of their own lives toward self-reliance improvement, which contributes to the self-help movement.
- 2) Even though online meetings are convenient and beneficial for communication during the COVID-19 outbreak, they cannot completely replace in-person training. The workshop, which includes relevant field trips, is critical in assisting project participants in understanding the real-world applications of good practices in the areas of food security and sufficiency.

## SUSTAINABILITY

- 1) These two on-site workshops could facilitate not only capacity development in food security, income generation, and self-reliance in the context of COVID-19, but also strengthen the networking and collaboration among practitioners close to their homes.
- 2) To better improve the lives of their friends, families, and supporters, they are willing to use the TCS by APCD's lesson learned approaches.
- 3) A strong partnership has been formed between participants from Chiang Mai Province and Bangkok including resource persons and new potential partners such as BlueDot Partnerships Co., Ltd. through monthly online meetings.
- 4) The Participants from two areas have plans to develop a learning center for persons with ID. Participants will maintain the existing communication channels and support each other in running their social enterprises and advocating for the rights of persons with ID.

- 5) Upon completion of the training, project participants can further disseminate knowledge on food security and sufficiency through their networks, and become resource persons to promote healthy and independent living.

## CHALLENGES

During project implementation, there were various effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which could be addressed as the following key challenges:

- 1) Unpredictable COVID-19 pandemic postponed and changed activity plans.
- 2) Some participants who committed to attend two on-site trainings excused themselves from the Project due to COVID-19 infection before trainings began.
- 3) The focus of efforts to help self-advocates with ID and their families become more self-sufficient was altered because of the COVID-19 outbreaks. Several new field surveys were needed to re-arrange and find the appropriate training locations.
- 4) Due to COVID-19 crisis management, two training programs were divided and conducted for two different groups (Bangkok and Chiang Mai Province). This arrangement has affected due to the lack of co-knowledge exchange between both groups.
- 5) Regular testing by Antigen Test Kit (ATK) was done for safety purposes every two days during the in-person trainings period. APCD requested to all participants with friendly explanations on free COVID-19 environment setting, particularly self-advocates with ID, to understand the importance of ATK testing before and after the in-person training.

## VOICES OF PARTICIPANTS

### CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM I:



#### **Ms. Thippawan Wongsom**

Self-advocate with ID, Healing Family Foundation, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

“When I was in the training program, I made a lot of new friends. The TCS was introduced to me by APCD. The APCD staff are friendly. They showed me how to do gentle physical exercises. I tried to avoid gaining weight during COVID-19 and a few weeks before coming here. My mother and I both benefited from gentle physical activities. Also, I enjoy making plant protein from the fruit bio-fermented water. I also can make herbal salted eggs, and I want to sell them to my neighbors in the neighborhood. During and after COVID-19, I hope to lower our household expenses, increase our income, and improve our health. The ESCAP-APCD joint project is really appreciated, and I thank you for it.”



#### **Ms. Buachompoo Wutthidech**

Self-advocates with ID, Dulabhatorn Foundation in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

“The thing I like to do is fishing activities during the training. It is a new thing for me. I know how to make salted eggs. The things I learned I will share with my grandfather, grandmother, and friends. It can help them deal with COVID-19 situations on their own and stay healthy. Thanks to the ESCAP-APCD project and the Dulabhatorn Foundation for giving me the chance to learn more about how to deal with COVID-19.”



**Ms. Nittaya Prasertsri**

Mother, Healing Family Foundation, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand

“Indeed, attending the in-person training course represented an excellent opportunity for our family. The COVID-19 outbreak has affected our quality of life. I am a divorced mother. During the COVID-19 pandemic, my daughter gained more weight, while I struggled with daily expenses. The resource persons prioritized food security over revenue generation and instructed us about easy exercises at home. This is a way of life I support because we will have to live with COVID-19 for an extended period of time and I have no idea when this outbreak will cease. I will use food preservation techniques in every situation to help my family save money and strive toward self-sufficiency. For my daily routine, I will enjoy with making herbal salted eggs and sun-dried fish with my daughter. What I realized is that we must accept COVID-19 as a fact of life.”



**Mr. Thanawat Lumpongpaung**

an External Resource Person from the Tawanchai Foundation

“Participants with ID took part in organic farming exercises as part of their training, which made my day. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, I believe they will be capable of using the concept of organic gardening to live healthy, food-secure, and self-sufficient lifestyle. Even though I have some impairments, I believe that persons with disabilities can do great things. Parents and supporters, as well as favorable environments, can assist them to excel in society. It’s a challenge for them to apply but step-by-step they can reach a small achievement. In order to inspire others in society, success will be greater and more dominant when they make efforts together with their parents and supporters”.

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM II:



### **Mr. Narongrit Wattana-iabphan (Oat)**

Leader of Dao Ruang (Marigold)  
Self-advocate Group of Persons with ID,  
Bangkok, Thailand

“I was excited to participate in the on-site training session. I feel I can apply what I’ve learned to daily life while fighting COVID-19. I enjoy hands-on activities, such as backyard gardening on balconies, mushroom baskets,

herbal salted eggs, Thai herb plants for our health, and Thai natural soaps. I think I could apply it right away. I’d like to sell natural soaps to supplement Dao Ruang Group’s income. I appreciate the ESCAP-APCD collaboration for these fantastic chances to deal with COVID-19. I am convinced that if we have the opportunity to join in any meetings, I would provide useful experiences for our members.”



### **Ms. Phatcharin Sujaritwattanasak (Som)**

Secretary of Dao Ruang (Marigold),  
Self-advocate Group of Persons with ID,  
Bangkok, Thailand

“The COVID-19 lockdown affected my friends with disabilities and me in Thailand. I saw people wearing masks and avoiding close in-person contact. This project taught us how to create vegetable gardens, make mushroom baskets, herbal salted eggs, and

grow green chiretta for our fundamental food and health care at home. I learned how to exercise easily at home. I appreciate the Thai herbal soap training curriculum. It’s simple for us to increase collective income. We’ll put them up on Facebook to sell in the future. Thank you to the field practices at the Golden Jubilee Museum of Agriculture.”



**Ms. Sugunya Srisawang**

Parent leader's member of Dao Ruang (Marigold) Self-advocate Group of Persons with ID, Bangkok, Thailand

“Our home is in Bangkok. Of course, we depend on purchasing food. During the COVID-19 lockdown, we were overwhelmed by daily expenses. Prior to taking the training program, I could not imagine how veggies could be grown on concrete with few resources. For the time

being, we have acquired a great deal of knowledge on how to grow vegetables and mushrooms in a basket for food security without spending a lot of money. The program taught us to access materials for small gardening at home. It is crucial that we have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to increase the independence of individuals with ID and their families during and after the COVID-19. This project is very helpful to us. Thanks a lot!”



**Dr. Suchaya Thiensaengthong**

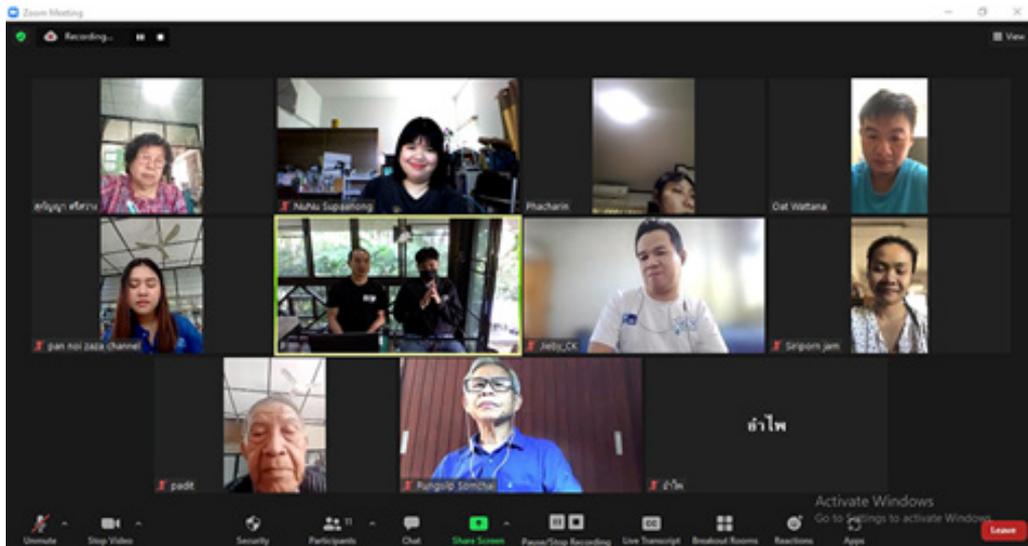
an external resource person/Foundation for Children with Disabilities (FCD)

“For this interview, I share a poem called *“A disabled kid is a kid Tiny heart's desire to dream on to feel more like the dreams of others.”* I encourage all families to continue making lovely things for their children. Please always have faith in the immense power of love from both hands and the heart of a powerful parent. They can become self-sufficient both throughout and after COVID-19. That is something I feel confident to say.

# APPENDICES

## PHOTOS

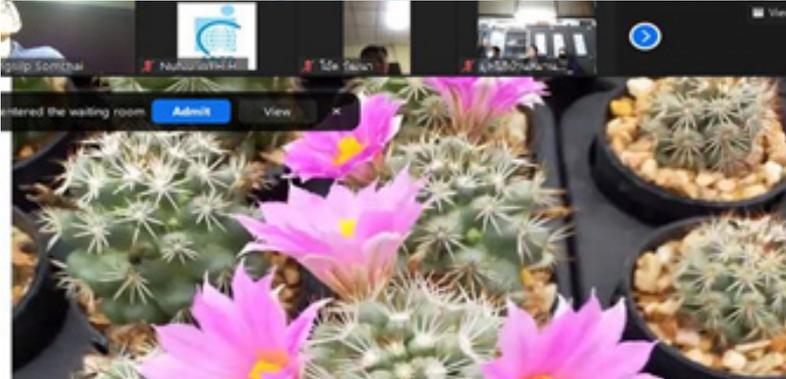
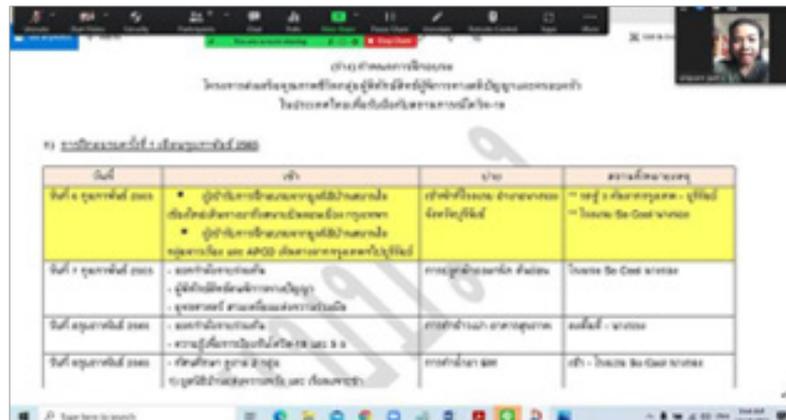
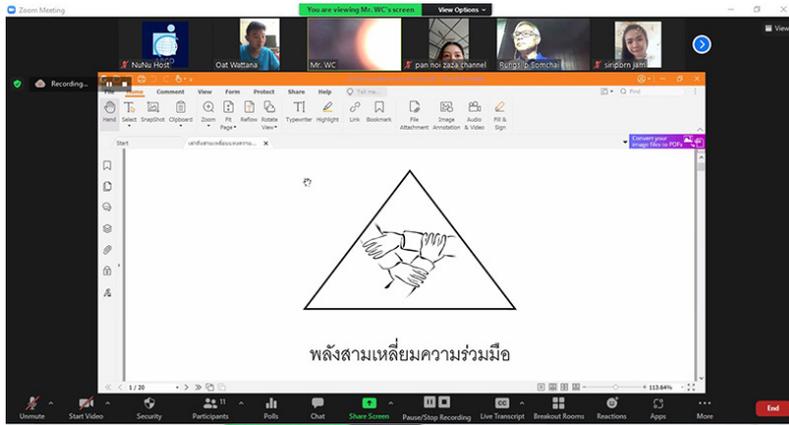
Conduct monthly online meetings with participants and resource persons



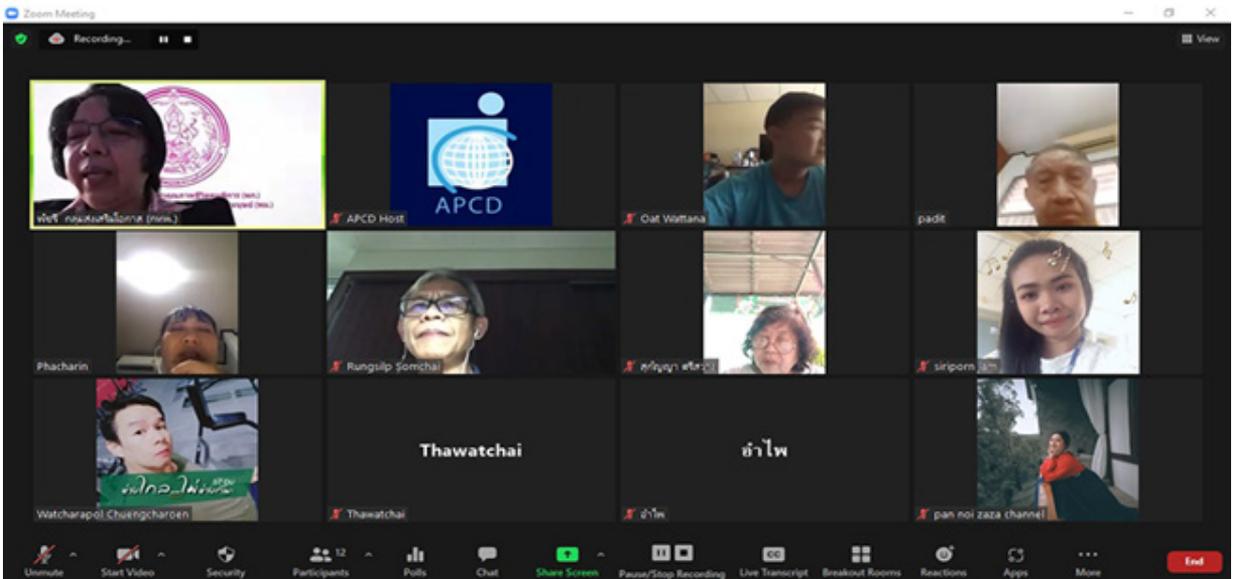
*Monthly online meetings among self-advocates with ID, their family members, supporters, and APCD staff*



*Process on enhancing capacity of persons with intellectual disabilities to lead healthy, food-secure and independent lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic*



Knowledge sharing during online training sessions



*Ms. Patcharee Srisala, Resource Person of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEP), presented the significance of the loan scheme to improve the lives of Thai persons with disabilities and shared a case study of the scheme’s achievements*



*A field survey for the ESCAP-APCD Partnership Project capacity building workshops in Nakhon Nayok, Pathum Thani Province on March 11, 2022, and in Chiang Rai and Chiang Mai Provinces on March 16–18, 2022. APCD gave updated publication for field host.*

## Delivery of participatory training workshop I in Lamphun Province for Chiang Mai Group



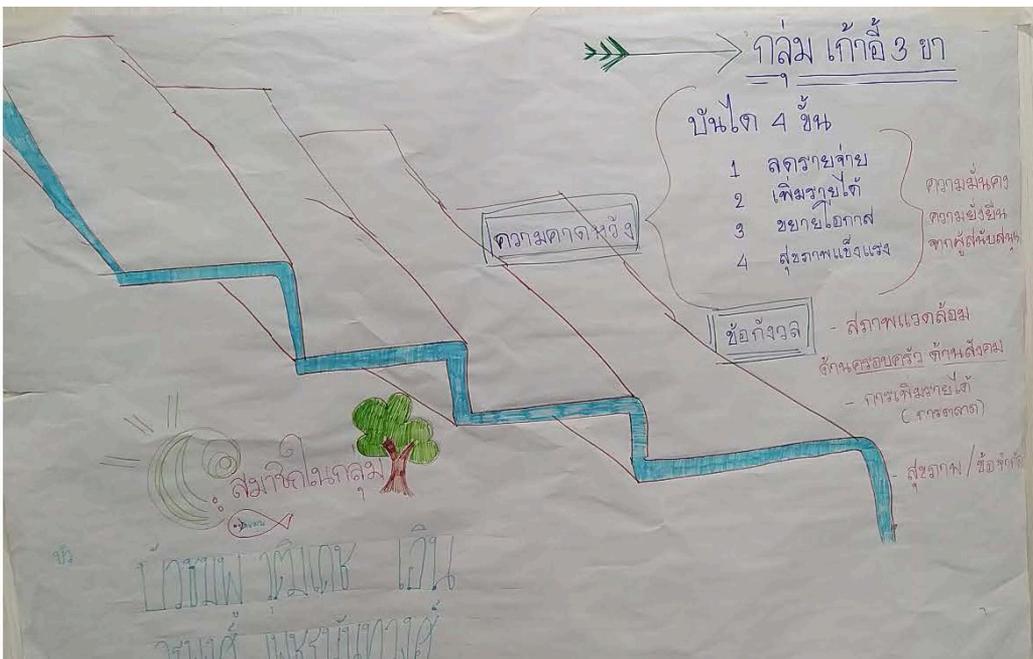
*At organic farming, a group photo of participants and resource persons*



*Enhance trainees' health through physical activity and encourage them to practice on a daily basis in the face of COVID-19 pandemic.*



*On-site skill development was carried out to ensure that group members in Chiang Mai Province are able to have food-security, and lead independent lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.*



*Group reflection on improving the quality of life for Thai persons with intellectual disabilities to cope with COVID-19 Pandemic.*

## Delivery of participatory training workshop II in Pathum Thani Province for Bangkok Group



*Group photo of participants during the opening ceremony with Mr. Piroon Laismit, Executive Director of the APCD. Together with APCD staff and observers from Association of Persons with Intelligence Disability of Thailand.*



*After the closing ceremony, participants, resource persons, and trainers posed for a group portrait at the second on-site capacity development program.*



*Three external resource persons shared key view point of participants' action plan towards further implementation*



*APCD project staff exchanged lesson learned about the Triangle Collaboration Strategy to enhance capacity development of persons with ID and their families in Mekong sub-region countries.*



*During the closing ceremony, a self-advocate with ID read recommendations on “ID’s voice must be heard” that they worked on with their families and supporters*



*The Self-advocates with ID showed their ability to improve self-reliance in the field practical programs*



*The APCD introduced friendly physical activities that can be practiced at home.*

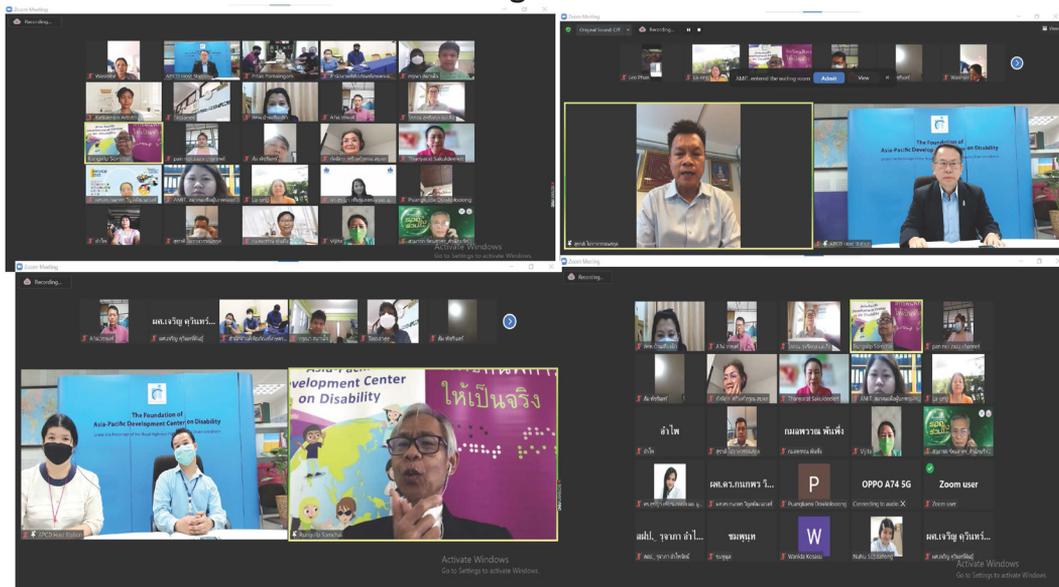


*Participants holding their certificates and APCD staff posing with Doo-Doo, the Museum mascot, in a group photo.*

The final in-person follow up activity took place in Bangkok and Pathum Thani province on May 23–25, 2022.



On 27 May 2022, the APCD summed up the key lessons learned and achievement at the online meeting with Thai stakeholders.





## **The Lamphun ‘s Recommendations “ID’s Voice Must Be Heard”**

We are self-advocate groups of persons with intellectual disabilities who live in Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. We are from the Healing Family Foundation and the Dulabhatorn Foundation. On Tuesday, April 5th, 2022, we met together in Lamphun Province at the five-day workshop on “Improving Self-Reliance of Self-advocates with Intellectual Disabilities and Their Families in Thailand”. With the help of ESCAP-APCD partnership Project, our families and supporters, we were able to meet each other. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, we use the Triangle Collaboration Strategy to learn important skills that helped us live healthy, food-secure, and free lives.

We also talked about our concerns and ideas for the future with the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD) and other key partners.

During the workshop, we learned how important it is to work well with other people. We decided to strengthen our relationship with the Tawanchai Foundation, the Dao Ruang Group, BlueDot Partnerships Co., Ltd., and the APCD, to help more friends with intellectual disabilities live healthy, food-secure, and independent daily lives. Through this network, it’s great for us to get to know other friends with intellectual disabilities in different parts of the country.

If we work together, we hope that our voices will be heard by more Thai people, and by people from other countries in the future, too.

*Agreed by the Participants of the “Improving Self-Reliance of Self-advocates with Intellectual Disabilities and Their Families in Thailand”  
on 10th April (Sun) 2022, Grand Pa Hotel, Lamphun Province, Thailand*



## **The Pathum Thani ‘s Recommendations “ID’s Voice Must Be Heard”**

We are a self-help group of persons with intellectual disabilities who live in Bangkok, Thailand. We are all responsible for becoming independent and helping friends to be independent in society. We are from the Dao Ruang (Marigold) Group (the first self-advocate group of persons with intellectual disabilities in Thailand), and we spend our lives with the other people in a supportive society towards positive optimism.

On May 4th, 2022, we met at a five-day capacity development workshop titled “Improving Self-Reliance of Self-advocates with Intellectual Disabilities and Their Families in Thailand” in Pathum Thani Province, Thailand. We thank the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) for supporting the project.

For this project, our families, supporters, and resource persons helped us get to know each other towards creating better quality of our lives. The Triangle Collaboration Strategy (TCS) helped us learn key skills that supported us to live healthy, food-secure, and independent lives during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. We also talked about our concerns and ideas for future collaboration with them and other family members/ supporters.

It is important to work well with other networks. We learned this during a training session we took. We understood that persons with intellectual disabilities can live healthy, food-secure and independent lives if we can continually work with groups as a network. We found the following organizations as potential network members: the Golden Jubilee Museum of Agriculture (Public Organization), the House of Hope Foundation, Foundation of Children with Disabilities, the Association of Parents of Person with Intelligences Disability of Thailand, the Healing Family Foundation, the Dulabhatorn Foundation, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, and APCD.

There are a lot of friends with intellectual disabilities in different parts of Thailand and other countries that we want to meet and share our common concerns. If we work together, we hope that our voices will be loud enough to be heard by more Thai people and by people from other countries in the future.

*Agreed by the Participants of the “Improving Self-Reliance of Self-advocates with Intellectual Disabilities and Their Families in Thailand”  
8th May (Sun) 2022, Golden Jubilee Museum of Agriculture, Pathum Thani Province,  
Thailand*



## APCD's Recommendations

The ESCAP-APCD partnership project was implemented under entitled “Protecting and Empowering Persons with Disabilities in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic” from 1 February 2021 to 31 May 2022. The project focused on “Improving Self-Reliance of Self-Advocates with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and their Families in Thailand”. The project was successfully executed by APCD in partnership with Dao Ruang Group, Healing Family Foundation, and Dulabhatorn Foundation as direct benefits and partnership with several organizations in the practical fields of food security and self-reliance living to cope with COVID-19 pandemic.

Approximately 30 representatives from APCD partners and key stakeholders in Thailand participated on Online Stakeholder Meeting on 27 May 2022. They are aware of self-advocacy, food security, health promotion, and independent living activities of individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families as a result of the Project's achievements.

Consequently, the recommendations of the APCD were considered, and it was determined that capacity development programs for persons with intellectual disabilities and other types of invisible disabilities, or what we refer to as the emerging group enabled to live with dignity in society, can be strengthened by:

- i. The most effective to disseminate knowledge and best practices about living healthy, food-security, and independent lives as new trend initiatives that foster their continued networking and collaboration development.
- ii. Endorsing the Triangle Collaboration Strategy (TCS), which aims to enhance the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities via effective collaboration between self-advocates, their families, and supporters to become potential young leaders with intellectual disabilities in the future.
- iii. Strong commitment and active engagement of all practitioners and relevant stakeholders, including persons with intellectual disabilities, to shift their mindset to “Yes, ID, we can”. They can regain the confidence to live joyfully with their family and community.
- iv. Local community-based efforts on the TCS should be promoted into their healthy life, food-security, and independent living for other types of invisible disabilities.
- v. The model of the project on developing quality of life for individual persons with intellectual disabilities and their self-advocate groups should be scaled-up and further extend opportunities from Thailand to other countries in Mekong Sub-region, Asia-Pacific Region with the fully support of the ESCAP and other international development partners.



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