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## **Promoting Occupational Justice: Three-Tiered Empowerment Model for Disability Awareness in Afghanistan**

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Thirty years of civil war and political upheaval in Afghanistan produced hundreds of thousands of people with physical disabilities and related psychological symptoms. In response, the U.S. State Department funded a project to address these needs by empowering Afghan disability advocates to build systems and policy foundations that promote occupational justice and provide services for persons with disabilities. This project has involved occupational scientists, disability studies scholars, and public health professionals, including leaders of nongovernmental organizations in Afghanistan and the U.S. The project is an example of emerging role possibilities for occupational therapists, nationally and in developing countries.

Objectives:

The poster will facilitate understanding the role of occupational therapy in:

- 1) Applying the World Health Organization International Classification of Function (ICF) community based rehabilitation (CBR), and information based rehabilitation (IBR) conceptual models in meeting the needs of persons with disabilities,
- 2) Indicate potential roles for occupational therapists in promoting occupational justice through the disability awareness program developed in the United States and developing countries,
- 3) Depict the step by step dynamics of this type of program development, and
- 4) Present potential barriers, facilitators, and rewards associated with implementing such programs.

Afghani applicants were screened and selected for training on disability awareness in St. Louis, Missouri, USA in 2006. The two week training program provided a variety of topics, balanced with site visits of models that promote inclusion, access, and occupational justice for persons with disabilities in the community throughout the lifespan. In addition, each Afghan professional was linked with a local mentor who agreed to maintain an ongoing relationship and provide current resources to their mentee to address emerging needs. In 2008, from the original core disability working committee, two individuals were selected to return to the U.S. for more intensive training and exposure to individuals, services and government agencies that provide critical advising and other support. These individuals were equipped to provide disability awareness training to people with physical disabilities and caregivers throughout Afghanistan. This population tier serves as the ultimate goal for changing the face of disability and occupational justice in Afghanistan.