



INCLUSION

**PWDS WANT INCLUSION
IN ALL AREAS** PAGE 26-27

STATISTICS

**LACK OF DATA IMPEDING
PWDS SUPPORT** PAGE 32

SUPPORT

**BAKATEYAMBA ALWAYS
THERE FOR PWDS** PAGE 36



OFTEN THOSE WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES ARE LOCKED UP WHILE THE INVISIBLE



Persons with disability climbing down the steps of a building with difficulty. They often suffer from stigma and rejection by society

PWDS WANT INCLUSION IN ALL

By John Odyek

Persons with disabilities in Uganda suffer from exclusion from many aspects of life. The ministry of labour, gender and social development, NGOs supporting persons with disability, disability people organisation have therefore called for inclusion in matters of health, education, politics, security, employment and economic empowerment.

Notably children with disability suffer the most with schools being inaccessible for them through lack of the right physical infrastructure and lack of school fees. Due to lack of economic empowerment persons with disabilities are unable to access and afford different services.

There is a rise and lack of awareness about invisible disabilities. There is need to enhance inclusion of these disabilities in national, local, corporate planning and development programmes. Persons with disability suffer from stigma and rejection by society. When jobs are advertised, they are often not considered even if they qualify.

Uganda will join the rest of the world to celebrate the International Day for Persons with Disabilities. This Day is commemorated to create awareness on the importance of promoting equality and full participation of persons with disabilities in social life as well as development. In an effort to support persons with disability the government has appointed the

minister of state for gender, labour and social development in charge of disability affairs Hellen Asamo.

According to Uganda Bureau of statistics (UBOS) Disability monographic study of 2019, disability prevalence stood at 14% (15% female and 12% male) of the 40.3 million population of Uganda. This translates to about 5,642,000 Ugandans with disabilities. Often, those with severe disabilities are locked up in houses while the invisible groups are not easily identified.

The report, multiple disabilities (where majority of invisible categories of disability fall), constitute 36% (1.4 million) of persons with disabilities. Disability was found to increase significantly with age, and disability among people aged 85 years and above was found to be at 71%.

The global theme for this year is: "Leadership and Participation of Persons with Disabilities, Towards an Inclusive, Accessible and sustainable Post COVID19". The national theme is: "Not All Disabilities Are Visible: A Call for a stronger post COVID-19 Agenda" This was selected to draw attention to the fact that many times invisible disabilities such as hydrocephalus, autism, epilepsy, mental disability, albinism, psychosocial disabilities, down syndrome, cerebral palsy and deafblind or double disability are not profiled like others such as blindness, physical disability.

According to the minister mental disability includes the slow learners or learning and intellectual disability.



Children with disability suffer moving around at school

This is generally characterized by a combination of abnormal thoughts, perceptions, emotional behavior and relationships with others and inability to comprehend or remember what is taught in class. This category of disability is not much understood and its worse with children who are frequently perceived as naughty, stubborn or ill-mannered by their families and communities and in most cases may not be given the required support.

The minister said that girls and women with disabilities can be

contextually categorized as invisible groups of persons with disabilities due to cultural stereotypes that put a double burden on them. Girls and women with disabilities face a doubled edged sword arising from gender, based violence. It is estimated that one in every five women is a woman with disability. For women with disabilities, GBV is often associated with the disability-based discrimination but also associated with the myths and the stereo-types attached to girls and women with disabilities which

promote sexual and gender-based violence and harassment. For example, it has been reported that girls and women with disabilities are sometimes raped and used as sexual objects to "cure HIV/AIDS".

The passing of the long awaited National Social Security Fund (NSSF) Amendment Bill 2021 gives some relief to persons with disability. The chairperson of Parliament's committee on gender, labour and social development Flavia Kabahenda said that persons with disability face many disadvantages in society. Clause 13 of the Bill provides that persons with disability can access 50% of their savings upon reaching 40 years and saving for 10 years.

Kabahenda said that when a person with disability loses their job, they were unlikely to get others. Kabahenda said that was one key reason why they decided to allow persons with disability get bigger access for their midterm access of savings at the NSSF.

Mpindi Bumali the chairperson at the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU) said that many of the persons with invisible and marginalized disabilities are denied access to opportunities such as employment, education and social interaction due to their unseen disabilities and severe vulnerability.

"Others out of fear of stigma do not want to disclose their disability which makes them to live at risk and experience limited participation in the development process. On the other hand, there are those with visible disabilities but little or no



GROUPS ARE NOT EASILY IDENTIFIED



People with disability need support in form of wheel chairs

AREAS OF LIFE

There is need for the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities set out in international conventions and legal instruments, the Constitution and other laws in Uganda.

attention is paid to them in respect to inclusion in services and targeting in development programmes since majority are not mobile and many are not able to speak for themselves hence remaining marginalized within the disability and mainstream programming," Bumali said.

NUDIPU ON call to action to government, the civil society and the public asked for attention to the most marginalized disability categories by designing specific programmes that will empower them to effectively participate in the development processes.

Bumali explained that there are unique needs of persons with disabilities that may require special attention from service providers in respect to issues such as health, education and social inclusion.

Bumali petitioned the Government through the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development to design a social protection programme that will address the disability related costs; care and

support for the invisible disabilities since the majority of them are not able to independently cope with the formal employment programmes.

"The Ministry of Health should subsidise specialised health services, equipment's and medicines that are used to manage the specific disabilities under the marginalized and invisible categories. Such services should further be extended to lower health centres for early identification and intervention and easy access by persons with disabilities and their care givers," Bumali continued.

"The general public is encouraged to avoid stigmatising persons with invisible disabilities and parents and care takers for persons with invisible disabilities because stigma disempowers them to speak out and exhibit their potentials," Bumali emphasised.

Government has made efforts to protect the persons with disability Enactment of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2020. The law

provides for the protection and promotion of rights of persons with disabilities provided for in the Constitution under Article 35.

Under the Education Sponsorship Programme under the Joint Admission Board has seen an increased percentage of students with disabilities jump to 60%. This is in addition to affirmative action provided by the Higher Education Financing Board that prioritizes applicants with disabilities. Under the Constitution providing for affirmative action on political representation, there are representative of persons with disabilities across all political structures of Uganda.

There is a representation of persons with disabilities on boards and commissions. This has been critical in ensuring inclusive programming and development since persons with disabilities now have a voice in these boards and commissions. A tax relief is being given to companies that employ persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities have been considered under the Parish Development Model and allocated 10% of funds at the parish in addition to incorporating the structures for persons with disabilities within the management of the funds. This will go a long way in supporting our beneficiaries to partake of the programme in an inclusive manner.

Asamo added that as part of affirmative action to capacitate people with disabilities to access other programmes easily Government

USDC WANTS SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY

As Government prepares to re-open schools in January, Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC) has asked government to look into special way to support children with disabilities.

Priscilla Kisakyie Mugume the advocacy officer at the Uganda Society for Disabled Children (USDC) said that children with disabilities have unique challenges they face and cannot be treated like other children.

Mugume said that as government plans to open schools in January 2022, they ask stakeholders to assess the learning needs of all children including those with disabilities and formulate individual learning plans for them to enable them learn and achieve while in school.

USDC is implementing this learning model through the use of the National Learning Needs Identification (NLNI) Tool and Individualised Learning Plan (ILP) for the school going children with disabilities.

USDC calls on the ministry of education and sports to fast track the passing of the National Inclusive Education Policy to address the persistent challenges of ensuring meaningful inclusion in access to quality education for vulnerable, marginalized and children with disabilities including those whose disabilities are invisible.

USDC is a leading childhood disability focused NGO in Uganda, reaching over 8,000 children with disabilities annually.

Mugume said that the society operates in 14 districts demystifying inclusion, engaging in policy advocacy with National CSO networks and Government to foster learning.

She said that they ensure that inclusive policies that support the unique learning needs are in place, health outcomes of children with disabilities and uphold their rights to grow and thrive. USDC asked stakeholders to support

the implementation of inclusive education in Uganda.

The Literacy and Numeracy Survey conducted by UWEZO in 2019 showed declining rates of learning achievements especially for children with disabilities. The percentage of children in primary classes 3-7 who could read and comprehend a basic story at primary two level dropped from 39% in 2015 to 33% in 2018.

The report showed that the situation is worse for children with disabilities who are attending schools at lower rates and their learning outcomes are far lower.

The study showed that their educational experience is poorer, and they face a variety of exclusionary barriers that exacerbate inequality in the classroom. Mugume said that tracking academic outcomes of CWDs is usually difficult.

The 2017 Enable and USDC research indicates that a number of primary schools provided anecdotal evidence on disabled children successfully completing Primary Leaving Examination (PLE), but not the exact numbers. When asked how the CWDs were doing the common response was 'average', but no evidence such as class ranking was available.

When assessing the progress made by CWDs most schools used standard metrics the exam results, end of term/year tests. Experts consider these narrow metrics and not aligned to needs of some CWDs such as those with visual or hearing impairments and other disabilities which are generally invisible.

These barriers are further aggravated by lack of standard non-cognitive metrics for assessing the progress made by children with learning difficulties, which means educational outcomes cannot be measured in a real sense.

In addition to this, it hinders the teaching and learning process as it makes it harder for teachers to assess progression. These problems underline the need for better identification and assessment in schools.

to increase the Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities from sh5b the financial year 2020/21 to sh9.6b in the financial year 2021/22.

During the last financial year, the ministry disbursed grants to 834 PWD households to start income generating activities. In this financial year 2021/22, the ministry will disburse grants to 1,535 PWD households of which 780 households have already received the grants in the first and second quarters. The demand for the grant is high yet the budget is limited.

The ministry wants the budget of the grant to be raised to sh16b. This will enable the ministry reach 24,000 households targeting 36,000 persons with disabilities who need support to start income generating activities. The grants are a preparation and

grooming ground for persons with disabilities to understand how to manage enterprises, reduce vulnerability, increase household incomes and reduce exclusion from society.

There is need for the promotion of the rights of persons with disabilities set out in international conventions and legal instruments, the Constitution and other laws in Uganda.

There is need for equalisation of opportunities through which the various systems of society and the environment, such as services like parking spaces, walking ramps, activities, information and documentation, are made available to all but particularly to persons with disabilities without bias.



By Joseph Bahingwire

GOVT URGED TO ADDRESS INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

Despite the efforts by the Government and the milestones that have been achieved in the promotion of rights and wellbeing of the people with disabilities, a lot is left to be done in as far as addressing invisible disabilities is concerned.

Invisible disability or hidden disability, is an umbrella term that captures a whole spectrum of hidden disabilities or challenges that are primarily neurological in nature. They include; ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), anxiety disorders, allergies, Asperger Syndrome, asthma, autism, bipolar disorder, brain injuries, mental illnesses, among others.

Laura Kanushu, a Member of Parliament representing people with disabilities, says the Government has registered a number of successes in line with its mandate to promote the rights of people with disabilities, especially in relation to political participation and empowerment, but attention should shift to addressing invisible disabilities that have remained unattended to.

"Despite this year's international theme focusing on leadership and participation of persons with disabilities, we have decided to have our local theme on recognising the invisible disabilities. These have continued to affect many people, but little has been done to address them," Kanushu said.

Despite the inclusion of disability within policy tools, there are gaps in



PHOTO BY WILFRED SANYA

George Ochom (right), the president of Bweyogerere Namboole Rotary Club and other club members donate food to PWDs of Kireka during the COVID-19 lockdown

policies and plans as the solutions they present are limited in their scope and ambition. Kanushu thus asks the relevant authorities to come up with plans and policy framework that can address this challenge on top of ensuring that the laws passed to support this category of people are effectively enforced.

Kanushu, however, claims that PWDs

are still grappling with lack of access to education, as well as employment opportunities since most institutions do not have facilities designed to aid PWDs.

"PWDs are vulnerable by virtue of their impairment and negative societal attitudes arising from fear, ignorance, superstitions, neglect and lack of awareness. As a result, PWDs

"PWDs ARE STILL GRAPPLING WITH LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SINCE MOST INSTITUTIONS DO NOT HAVE FACILITIES DESIGNED TO AID THEM"

have inadequate access to services, information, resources, as well as limited participation in the socio-economic development process," she says.

She adds that most government educational institutions, such USE and UPE schools are not accessible by PWDs due to lack of facilities that can aid their education.

The World Health Organisation estimates that approximately 10% of any population is disabled. It also estimates that of the 10%, only 5.8% of persons with disabilities need

to be provided with services. The United Nations Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for PWDs urges all nations to show strong commitment on equalisation of opportunities for PWDs.

The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2019; Section 3, provides that a person with a disability shall enjoy the Constitution's enshrined fundamental and other human rights and freedoms. Section 6 provides non-discrimination in education and states that an institution of learning shall not discriminate against a learner with a disability. Section 9 (2) (a) and (c) of the Act provides that an employer shall, in any advertisement for a job, where appropriate, encourage persons with disabilities to apply, provide an employee with a disability reasonable accommodation in the performance of the job at task.

Kanushu challenges the Government that before they task private individuals to consider people with disabilities, it is the mandate of the Government to walk the talk and first allocate a percentage of the jobs in her ministries and MDAs to people with disabilities to make them more empowered.



A CALL FOR ACTION, POST COVID 19 AGENDA;

Katalemwa Cheshire Home for Rehabilitation Services (KCH) together with a network of Child Empowerment Partners (CEP) in Uganda join the rest of the World to commemorate the International Disability Day 2021. The theme for year reflects on "Not all disabilities are visible", A call for a post COVID Agenda.

As KCH we are proud of the 51 years serving children with disabilities in Uganda living under very difficult situations through comprehensive social and medical rehabilitation, provision of assistive devices, promotion of inclusive education and socio-economic empowerment. KCH's approach to its program implementation is through Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID), Twin track approach rights-based programming; lobby and advocacy. Each year KCH reaches out to over 15,000 children with disabilities through services ranging from medical to social economic empowerment programmes. These achievements have been realized through networking with various implementing partners (POs), Individuals, parents of children with disabilities, corporate companies, well-wishers, local and international donor agencies as well as the Government of Uganda.

Invisible disabilities normally pose a challenge because of their complex presentations, stigma and discrimination and limited statistical data. The invisible disabilities include; autism, down syndrome, hydrocephalus, mental retardation among others. Katalemwa has

been complementing Governments efforts in extending rehabilitation services to this category of people both at the center and in the community through removing and/or reducing barriers to their inclusion. Interventions for this category of children are beyond the individual child and hence require family and community at large as the challenge to their inclusion are fueled by stigma, attitudinal and environmental factors.



An occupational therapist engaging children with intellectual disabilities in learning activities, Early Learning Center KCH

COVID 19 instigated a lot of difficulties to persons with invisible disabilities because many depend on medicines and other medical reusables like catheters, regular therapy to sustain and improve their functionality. During Covid-19 pandemic measures that included; restrictions on private and ban public transport and consequently later increased costs of public transport after the easing of lockdowns has immensely reduced access to rehabilitation services. The limited access and availability of learning materials for learners with special needs during the lockdown has contributed to further lagging behind on their academic progress.

Katalemwa together with our Child Empowerment Partners (CEP), appeal to Government and other stakeholders to prioritize strengthening social and medical rehabilitation services for invisible disabilities at community and district level. This will increase access, availability and utilization of rehabilitation services for children with invisible disabilities and their families which will result into the full realization of their rights.

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HOPE FOR WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH

By Joseph Bahingwire

After undertaking a number of projects aimed at rehabilitating homeless people with disabilities on the streets of Kampala, Mental Health Uganda (MHU) realised that even when the needs of people living with mental health issues are similar, they are not quite the same since women have more challenges than their male counterparts.

HOPE MHU has therefore introduced a project that aims at providing hope to the mentally ill women on the streets. Barbara Lamara, the project leader at Mental Health Uganda, says in 2010 they conducted a one-year pilot project to rehabilitate homeless people living with mental health challenges



Christine Kayesu a client who was Rehabilitated from the streets and now has a liquid soap business

when the needs of people living with mental health challenges are similar, they are not the same since homeless women with mental health challenges have a wider range of needs as they can hardly bathe, they do not have access to sanitary pads and if they

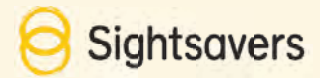
get pregnant, they are unable to take good care of themselves and their children as well as access to reproductive health services. "In 2018 we decided to focus on women and their children through the project; 'ACCESS TO HEALTH IS MY RIGHT.' Since June 2020, 521 homeless women with mental health challenges have been observed by the project team. This Project has brought a new dawn with a sharp ray of hope to these women," Lamara said. The project follows a

SINCE JUNE 2020, 521 HOMELESS WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN OBSERVED BY THE PROJECT TEAM.

Reunion model that entails reaching out to homeless women with mental health challenges on the streets of Kampala. The women are given psychosocial support, rehabilitated and referred for specialised care where necessary. They are then finally reunited with their families and communities. Lamara said the women are also attached to peer support groups in their communities to provide them with emotional support and foster friendships which facilitates social interactions among

the women so that they can assume responsibility and have a sense of belonging.

DROP-IN CENTRES UMH has first drop-in centres for these women with one at Rubaga hosted at the main centre. In order to bring services closer to women in the different divisions of Kampala, MHU, in partnership with KCCA, established two transit centres at Komaboga and Kiswa Health Centres to serve women from Kawempe and Nakawa divisions respectively with psychosocial support. The project has a legal aid desk that handles cases of abuse of the women. The common offences reported by the women are sexual abuse, assault and trespass to land. The project staff offer tele counselling to women and online follow up on the phone number **0778 035128/0701 748185**.



Sightsavers is an International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGO) that works with partners in developing countries to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunities for people with disabilities.

All Disabilities Matter – A call for Action in Inclusive Employment: Inclusion Works Program-

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) now called the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) awarded Sightsavers funding to lead a consortium, to deliver a three-year large-scale programme on formal employment of Persons with Disabilities called Inclusion Works.

The programme is implemented in four (4) countries (Uganda, Bangladesh, Kenya, and Nigeria), by a consortium, which includes the ADD International, Sightsavers, International Disability Alliance (IDA), the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Development Initiatives (DI), Inclusion International (II), BBC Media Action, Benetech, and Youth Careers Initiative (YCI). The overall aim of the program is to understand how supply chains and mechanisms can be influenced, at different levels, for greater disability inclusion in the formal and informal employment sectors.

In Uganda the programme is implemented in three regions (East, Central and West) ADD International leading implementation in Mukono, Wakiso, Kampala, Masaka, Mbarara and Kasese while Sightsavers leading implementation in Busoga and Bugisu sub-regions. Both ADD International and Sightsavers are working through Organizations of Persons with Disabilities at district levels and NUDIPIU at national level.

The Programme aims to achieve six outcomes 1) partnerships between private, public, and civil society strengthened; 2) enhanced skills for both women and men with disabilities; 3) Employers and employment service providers demonstrating more inclusive practices; 4) the disability movement in Uganda demonstrating strengthened capacity to lead and support inclusive employment interventions; 5) increased commitment from government and national employer organizations to enable inclusive employment for women and men with disabilities and 6) generating and disseminating effective, innovative and UNCRPD compliant evidence of what works to enable inclusive employment of women and men with disabilities.

Program achievements at a glance

- 170 women and men with disabilities received an online training on job searching and job retention.
- Over 320 job seekers accessed soft skills in CV writing, job search and job retention.
- 60 job seekers supported to receive job placement in different companies across the Programme regions
- 20 job seekers identified for financial support to start self-employment

142 employers trained on disability inclusion at the workplace including safeguarding skills.

Testimonies from program beneficiary

My name is TUSIKE FRED, aged 29 years old, and I come from Eastern Uganda, Bulambuli district. I'm a married youth with one woman and we have two children a boy and a girl. I'm the sole bread winner of the family. We do agriculture where we grow tomatoes, soya beans, beans, cassava and matooke on a small scale for survival and a small garden of passion fruits. I am living with a physical type of disability that is on all my four limbs. I got this disability in 1994, when I was 3 years old. The disability was caused by polio. At first, it was difficult for me to cope with the disability and life was hard. I used to think that no one would employ me since I could not hold things in my hands, so I developed self-denial and I had low self-esteem about myself getting into the job market. Of course, I must be selective in certain jobs that don't require heavy duties and riding, so this disability limits me to have bigger choices as far as jobs are concerned.



Figure 1: Fred in his former workplace Little Venice Hotel

The Inclusion Works Programme identified me while I was looking for a dream job in line with my profession and enrolled me for the Accenture online skills to succeed training. I studied fifteen online modules which built my job search skills and self-confidence.

The inclusion works programme connected me for a work placement opportunity at Little Venice Hotel in Sironko to work as a secretary. I was receiving 100,000 net pay per month, which I first looked at it as small money. I even first hesitated to take on the job offer because I felt the money was little but after a conversation with the Disability Inclusion Facilitator and the Project Officer, I made up my mind and took up the job. Since I have some knowledge in computer, I worked so well with my colleagues, we never had any issues only that the accommodation premises were far away from the hotel for my mobility at night. The hotel shifted my time so that I would move home early. I also had a challenge of washing clothes, my hands cannot support to hold clothes and wash so this was

discussed with the Project Officer and she requested manager of the hotel to allow the house keeping person wash for me occasionally.



Figure 2: Fred at his new work place at Elgon Soil Laboratories & Farm care

My colleagues treated me well at the hotel and they loved me, but unfortunately or fortunately I got a new job of my dream in my profession and left. My dream job was at Elgon Soil Laboratories and Farm Care. It is in my field of study, and I love what am doing only that sometimes field work is so hard for me moving from one place to another to get soil samples for testing. My mobility is not a good one to move from one place to another and I pray my boss understands it.

Inclusion works project in pictures



Figure 3: Inclusion works supported the Uganda Business and Disability Network



Figure 4: Winners of the innovation challenge receive a dummy cheque of 1000USD each.



Figure 5: An employer training session on disability inclusion at the workplace



GOVT URGED TO SUPPORT COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH CARE

By Joseph Bahingwire

As the world commemorates the International Disability Day under the theme, *Not All Disabilities are Visible*, in a call for stronger action during and after the post-COVID-19 era, the Government has been challenged to prioritise community-based mental health care instead of the institutionalised treatment as has been the norm.

Derrick Kiiza, the executive director, Mental Health Uganda says the COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on the mental health of many people due to its effects such as restricted movement, loss of jobs and lack of access to medical facilities for those with pre-existing mental health conditions.

COVID-19 did not bring new challenges in the mental health care sector but exposed the challenges we already had because we had not invested well in community mental healthcare.

He says if mental healthcare was at a community level it would have been easier for the people to get treatment and psychosocial support they required.

“COVID-19 did not bring new challenges in the mental health care sector but exposed the challenges we already had because we had not invested well in community mental

healthcare and the cost we paid was immense,” he says.

Kiiza adds that the situation worsened with the turning of mental treatment units at hospitals into COVID-19 treatment centres as mental health patients could no longer be admitted nor access treatment.

He explains that if the Government prioritises and



Governments should provide a policy to guide the treatment of mental health cases

supports community mental health care, it will enable easy access to services by those in need without having to travel long distances to get assistance from institutions such as hospitals.

“Such kind of healthcare also helps in early detection and referrals. Its assists in prevention through awareness and can create adherence to

medication by demonstrating that you can treat mental health challenges using a community approach in a modern system and not witch doctors,” he adds.

Kiiza also urged the Government to provide a policy framework to guide the treatment of mental health cases and allocate resources that will empower community

health facilities to handle such cases. Information obtained from the Ministry of Health indicates that mental and behavioural disorders are common, affecting more than 25% of all people at some time during their lives.

According to the World Health Organisation, mental disorders contribute 14% to the global burden of disease.

INVEST MORE IN COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH



ELIZABETH ACHOLA

The COVID-19 virus has been with us for close to two years now. We have withered the different presidential directives to slow down its spread but we cannot wish away the effects it has had on the lives of people.

The trauma and stress levels that exist among the population as a result of the pandemic is something that should worry us.

The uncertainty that we face every day; from the fear of contaminating the virus, loss of friends and loved

ones and concerns about sustaining jobs. We know for a fact that sustained stress exposure causes people to turn to damaging behaviour such as crime, reckless sexual acts, violence, domestic abuse and substance abuse.

When it comes to the experiences on women, violence and their needs for psychosocial support, we have to note that the rate at which women face violence always increases whenever there's a pandemic or situation of emergency. With this comes the high need for psychosocial support. Psychosocial support is support that looks at both the psychological aspects as well as the social aspects of an individual as well as the society, family and entire community and this support can be preventive and curative.

It helps individuals and communities to heal the psychological wounds and rebuild social structures after an emergency or a critical event.

Reports indicate that 80% of Ugandan youths drink alcohol. Without doubt, COVID-19 has imposed a significant mental health

burden upon the people of Uganda. In an article published by the *Independent* magazine on October 20, 2021, it was reported that in Uganda, like most African countries, mental healthcare was already weak before the epidemic.

The country has only 47 psychiatrists, most of who are based in Kampala, for a population of 42 million. Mental health services are mainly concentrated around the capital city.

The Ugandan government has ratified quite a number of legal instruments both regional and national that guarantee the right to health and many other rights.

For instance the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) specifically under Article 12 that enjoins Government to protect the rights to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

It also requires that the Government takes all effective and complete measures towards prevention, treatment and control of epidemics, among other things.

The 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Uganda also has provisions for upholding citizen's right to health and that includes mental health and people with disabilities among other domestic laws. All and above the Government has a responsibility and duty in providing psychosocial support to all its citizens.

Many different stakeholders and NGOs continue to call upon the government to invest more in mental health as Uganda only spends 9.8% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on healthcare and only 1% of that is spent on mental healthcare.

The adverse impact of COVID-19 on people with pre-existing mental health conditions cannot be over-emphasised. We continue to receive reports of physical and sexual violence meted out to persons with disabilities including those with mental disabilities in the communities. The perpetrators of these acts are usually members of family, communities and law enforcers. Many of these cases are not investigated and so perpetrators are

not prosecuted. Access to medication remains a challenge as many people with mental health problems are not able to move to areas where health services are. This is worsened by the absence of community-based services and social protection systems. The government however continues to make promises of more funding towards psychosocial support and whether or not this will soon be realised is a matter of speculation. We know that it is a duty of the government of Uganda to protect, promote and fulfil the right to health to ensure that persons with mental illness have access to community based social support services at the primary health care level and it ought to address some of these challenges by providing psychosocial support to mental health survivors especially during this period of the pandemic. This duty also extends to us the public to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

The writer is a legal officer at The Women's Probono

By Joseph Bahingwire

WHY LEGAL AID IS VITAL FOR PWDS

With the barriers that can impend people with disabilities from access to justice, access to legal aid can be the best way that PWDS can get representation and have their cases heard by the judicial systems and get justice.

This is because more often, people with disabilities have their rights abused but are a number to seek and find justice due to the discriminations subjected to them by the communities in which they live.

In Uganda, according to Aaron Besigye, the National Coordinator Justice Centres Uganda legal aid had been directed to mean free legal representation for indigent and vulnerable accused persons in the capital offences until the Lilongwe Declaration on Access to Legal Aid in Criminal Justice broadened the meaning to include legal service,

assistance, representation, education and mechanism for alternative dispute resolution.

In regard to the PWDS, article 13 of access to justice of the United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities emphasises the rights of persons with disabilities to ensure their participation in every stage of the legal proceedings so that they can get justice.

However, Besigye reasons that there are a lot of barriers to get justice by the PWDS hence the need for legal aid to be extended to such people as PWDS as well as women Victims of gender based violence.

"The immediate barrier of access to justice by the PWDS is the physical access to buildings including courts of law, police stations and legal services since many structures are constructed in a way that do not allow access by



PWDS are at times affected by failure to access buildings

many PWDS. Most of these lack facilities such as ramps that would enable PWDS assess them to get justice," he says.

Besigye reasons that in such cases legal aid will have a vital role to play to remove the physical barriers to gaining access

to justice including allocating resources to develop plans to ensure accessibility.

He adds that despite the existence of minimum accessibility standards in Uganda, there are varying degrees of compliance regarding the physical

accessibility of courts and other JLOS institutions.

"However, despite the need for legal aid to be extended to people with disabilities, the lack of free legal aid centres across the country since most of them are concentrated in Kampala has affected the quality of representation for the PWDS," he further says.

Besigye advises that every stake holder must take active measures to ensure equal access to the justice systems by setting up legal aid schemes in all parts of the country. He adds that the state should ensure that PWDS are represented and get the required legal aid especially in cases involving violation of their human rights.

The other reason why legal aid is required by PWDS is their lack of access to information. It would be meaningless if a person with disability

attended that court room but cannot understand or communicate during the proceedings due to lack of appropriate information and accommodations.

Therefore, legal aid organizations can play a big role to ensure access to information and communication that facilitates effective participation of a person with disability for whatever roles they take in the justice system and all legal proceedings.

"By conducting targeted outreaches for these persons with disabilities, the outreach can empower them by giving them knowledge about their rights. For example outreaches for disabled women can enable them raise their issues without men being around," Besigye noted.

He thus calls for the passing of the National Legal Aid Policy into law to act as an institutionalized frame work for the regulation of legal aid services.



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LACK OF DATA ON PWDs IMPEDES ACCESS TO VITAL SERVICES IN MASAKA

By Davis Buyondo

Tracking of People With Disabilities (PWDs) for different services is still a great challenge in the Greater Masaka region due to the lack of specific information and statistics concerning the PWDs in all district departments and mainly those meant to manage PWDs.

This, however, has failed access to better services among people with different kinds of disabilities for years.

Much as the Government is trying to extend all the services to its people, a lot needs to be done in the PWDs section.

WHAT ACTIVISTS SAY

According to different PWDs activists, even the data in government departments mainly captures disabilities that are visible forgetting invisible disabilities which leaves the majority disregarded in one way or the other.

Richard Musisi, the executive director, Masaka Association of Disabled Persons Living with HIV/AIDS (MADIPHA), said the World AIDS Day and the World Day of PWDs are significant in the lives of the PWDs since they are used to bring out the core issues that affect PWDs in terms of accessing HIV/AIDS services and the inequalities that exist.

He adds they still do not know the actual number of the PWDs in the region and the majority are being left out of different opportunities.

According to Musisi, the National Identification Registration Authority (NIRA) never had a provision to capture information about people's disabilities for consideration in case of any opportunities.

He further notes that different PWDs have not been reached particularly during the COVID-19 lockdown since they are unknown. "Apart from the 500 members we have in our registers, we are still struggling to identify more persons with disabilities of all categories," he explains.

"There are several inequalities faced by PWDs including the lack of disaggregated data for effective planning in terms of access to HIV/AIDS services



Left-right: Bugembe, Musisi, Mudasiru Bbaale, the Masaka chairperson-MADIPHA and Josephine Nassiwa (staff)

and others and the service providers do not reach out to the majority PWDs in different communities," he adds.

Charles Ssegirinya, the Rakai district PWD councillor says there is no specific data about PWDs available in the district.

Ssegirinya notes that he is using his leadership positions to advocate for the rights of PWDs in the region as they push the Government to design programmes that prioritise their needs are like it is will other people.

"Carrying out a census of PWDs in the country helps to avail equal opportunities. But it is rare to have PWDs employed in district local governments in Masaka region. Some may have the qualification but it is hard to identify or to consider them," he says.

The PWDs further appeal to the Ministry Of Health and Uganda AIDS commission to have an indicator of the PWDs accessing a particular HIV/AIDS service in different health services such as antenatal, family planning, and general health services.

Dick Bugembe, the founding chairperson for MADIPHA, says there are several PWDs who are not known or captured

Apart from the 500 members we have in our registers, we are still struggling to identify more PWDs.

in the system in the region.

STATISTICS

Bugembe says while statistics indicate that 12.4 % of the population are living with disabilities something there is more who cannot be traced for assistance to access the services of their choice.

Currently, Uganda has approximately 1.4 million people living with HIV and 1.2m are on ART while 98,000 children are on treatment, according to the Uganda AIDS Commission (UAC).

Dr Nelson Musoba, the director general UAC, says the world's target is to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030, but Uganda is looking to achieve the 95% target just by 2025. If the target is achieved in 2025 then the country will

be able to end the pandemic by 2030.

However, Musisi wants the Uganda AIDS Commission to indicate the number of PWDs on ART to help maintain them in a bid to achieve the 95% and 2030 targets.

"The numbers are generalised without clear data of PWDs on ART. It makes it difficult for us to follow and encourage them to take their drugs for viral suppression like others without disabilities.

INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

Invisible disability simply means an unseen incapacity or limitation to a person's daily activities.

These include hearing and vision impairments, brain injuries, devastating pain, learning, mental health disorders and others.

According to Musisi (MADIPHA), some of the invisible disabilities may graduate from minor to severe and even cause permanent disabilities.

He explains that some disabilities stem from different ailments such as cerebral pulse, sickle cells and epilepsy, among others.

He says this year's World

Disability day looks at the invisible disabilities which exist among a big population and it may catapult into worse conditions and permanent disabilities.

"There is quite a big number of people with the invisible disabilities who are marginalised because their impairments," he says.

He notes that services such as ramps in hospitals and health centres and some buildings may help the person in a wheelchair or with crutches but they are not vital to a deaf or a person with intellectual disabilities who need extra support to access the services.

"If there is no person to sign for him then it may be difficult for the deaf person to access the HIV/AIDS services among others," he says.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Ivan Ndawula, a sign language interpreter in Kyotera district says PWDs can do so much if included and prioritised in

PEER GROUPS

The People with Disabilities (PWDs) have formed peer groups to share relevant information about sex and reproductive health and to access services as a group. Through the community peer monitors such as deaf-to-deaf peer groups, they are able to reduce different challenges relating to sex, relationship, stigma and others.

Mudasiru Bbaale, the Masaka district chairperson -MADIPHA, and one of the senior educators says lack of sign interpreters deprives them of effectively accessing sex and reproductive health services.

He says it is through the peer groups that they can discuss and resolve some concerns about health services.

Although the government is mandated to provide sign language interpreters in government health facilities to help the deaf, Bbaale added that none of the health centres and hospitals in Masaka region has such trained personnel.

At least over one million Ugandans suffer from hearing disabilities, according to the 2014 National Housing and Population Census, who need assistance.

different programmes.

For the sake of politics, Ndawula notes that the PWDs hold a powerful vote that needs to be collected by candidates at all levels but the politicians have on several occasions neglected the opportunity.

According to Godfrey Kimbugwe, the Rakai district Community Development Officer (CDO), several people with disabilities and other marginalised groups especially in the remote communities are not reached often due to lack of transport facilitation.

He says the nature of their work as CDOs is field-based and it is difficult to visit the remote communities within a distance of more than 100km without means of transport.

PHOTO BY DAVIS BUYONDO



Refugee Law Project

School of Law, Makerere University
A Centre for Justice and Forced Migrants



Invisible Disabilities and Access to Inclusive Education in the Context of Forced Displacement

Today marks exactly 29 years since the United Nations General Assembly declared 3 December as the International Day for Persons with Disability (PWDs) in 1992. The day was first observed on 3 December 2008 to encourage governments and other organizations to develop measures of improving the lives of PWDs across the world.

In the same spirit, Refugee Law Project joins the rest of the world to commemorate this day under the national theme **“Not all Disabilities are Visible: A call for a Stronger Post-COVID-19 Agenda”**. The international theme is: **“Leadership and Participation of Persons with Disabilities Toward an Inclusive, Accessible and Sustainable Post-COVID-19 World.”**

The Persons with Disability act 2020 defines disability as a “substantial functional limitation of a person’s daily life activity caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment and environmental barriers, resulting in limited participation in society on equal basis.”

“Not all disabilities are visible” is a timely theme and extends our understanding of disabilities and a call to all relevant stakeholders to reflect on what this means to inform all actions geared towards inclusion.

In 2020, the World Health Organization released a report on disability which revealed that more than one billion people live with some form of disability. Out of one billion people, 450 million live with mental health or neurological conditions. In 2016, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, through a census on disability, showed that the disability prevalence in children below four years was at 12.4%. Children of five years and above was close to 14 per cent. The census, however, focused more on visible disabilities, including difficulty in seeing, walking and hearing.

The Nexus Between Invisible Disabilities, Inclusive Education and Displacement

Disability implies significant difficulty in functioning and can manifest in physical, social and mental forms. While some children are born with conditions that make them have a disability, others acquire them later in life due to different factors, including disease, accident or other traumatic experiences. Invisible disabilities are those disabilities that are not easily seen by the human eye and are hidden. Children with conditions such as autism, dyslexia, attention deficit Hyperactive Disorder, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, low vision and hard of hearing, socio-emotional difficulties, among others, are often misunderstood because their disability is hidden. Children that manifest such conditions may be perceived as naughty, stubborn or ill-mannered by their families and communities and, in most cases, may not be given the necessary support. Other conditions like chronic illnesses, sleep disorders, and trauma-related difficulties that significantly impair normal activities of daily living over a long period are all hidden conditions that affect children’s wellbeing and access to education.

It is also important to note that even within these different categories, conditions are not the same in every child so is functionality. Children are also affected by the distinct socio-economic, political that may further affect their wellbeing and accentuate their disabling conditions, limiting their access to education.

Inclusive education recognizes that children have varied learning needs. It, therefore, asserts that inclusive education should integrate children and young people with disabilities, or those who are vulnerable, into mainstream schools and create a learner-friendly environment that is responsive to the individual and unique needs of all children. (Uganda draft inclusive education policy). This is the way to an inclusive, acceptable and sustainable world. However, children with disabilities are often excluded from education due to many barriers; they often delay starting school and are more likely to drop out.

The realities we see in refugee children and other vulnerable children indicate that displacement complicates and exacerbates both visible and invisible disabilities. Approximately 1 in 3 children we work with have witnessed a traumatic experience before and during flight like death, torture and other serious harm. Some of these incidences include their caretakers. In addition, these children have to make adjustments in a different environment with limited support from the family. These experiences further complicate the condition of a child

with a pre-existing disability, visible or hidden. This calls for careful thought in designing appropriate interventions to ensure access to education for refugee children with special needs.

Trauma and distressing childhood experiences can expose children to a greater risk of developing emotional and mental health challenges, which unattended to can lead to prolonged hindrance to learning or even become a permanent disability. Traumatic experiences can lead to mental illnesses like anxiety, depression, PTSD, and distress. Results of a study conducted in 2020 on the prevalence of Depressive Disorders and Associated Demographic Factors Among Refugees found the prevalence rate of depression among both urban and settlement based refugees was at 48%. Depression and other mental illnesses can make the child feel like they are incompetent, easily irritable, change in behaviour which affects relationships and can lead to self-harm and affect the child’s sleeping patterns. All these symptoms affect the child’s social and emotional functioning ability which can negatively impact the child’s wellbeing, development and consequently learning.

Continued advances in neurobiology and psychological studies are discovering that traumatic experiences in childhood can diminish a child’s concentration, memory and language abilities that are fundamental for a child to access and succeed in school.

To ensure inclusive education for many refugee children, caretakers, teachers, and service providers should be aware of visible and invisible disabilities and, whenever possible, when other hidden conditions interrupt and hinder pupils’ learning. We believe that many of us now anticipate that after two years of being out of school, many children and young people will return to school with emotional difficulties that will require additional support to adjust more successfully.

Young people are physical and psychosocial beings; as we seek to build better inclusive school environments. We need to be aware of the physical and more visible and go beyond the surface into the more hidden needs of the children we are working with, such that we can identify where it is enabling them and where it is becoming a source of “disability” also.

What needs to be done?

1. An integrated approach is required from the local to a national level to ensure that children and young people with special needs are encouraged to enrol and resume school in time. Mental health and disability awareness-raising should target all stakeholders. Ministry of Education should include teachers in attaining knowledge and skills of identifying and supporting children with special needs.
2. Through the Education Response Plan, the government should aim at employing psychologists, school counsellors, and special needs specialists to support in providing assessment and rehabilitation for children.
3. The government should fast track the enactment of the inclusive education policy to guide appropriate approaches to inclusion in education.



Trauma and distressing childhood experiences can expose children to a greater risk of developing emotional and mental health challenges, which unattended to can lead to prolonged hindrance to learning or even become a permanent disability. Traumatic experiences can lead to mental illnesses like anxiety, depression, PTSD, and distress. Results of a study conducted in 2020 on the prevalence of Depressive Disorders and Associated Demographic Factors Among Refugees found the prevalence rate of depression among both urban and settlement based refugees was at 48%. Depression and other mental illnesses can make the child feel like they are incompetent, easily irritable, change in behaviour which affects relationships and can lead to self-harm and affect the child’s sleeping patterns. All these symptoms affect the child’s social and emotional functioning ability which can negatively impact the child’s wellbeing, development and consequently learning.



Quote:

“The Commitment to Realizing the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is not only a Matter of Justice; it is an Investment in a Common Future”.
António Guterres, UN Secretary General.





MINISTRY OF GENDER, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



H.E. Gen. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni
NRM Party Chairman and President of the Republic of Uganda



Hon. Betty Amongi Ongom
Minister of Gender, Labour and Social Development



Hon. Asamo Hellen
Minister of State for Disability Affairs



Yona Wasswa
Chair Person National Council for Persons with Disabilities



Aggrey David Kibenge
Permanent Secretary

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES - 3RD DECEMBER, 2021

THEME: "NOT ALL DISABILITIES ARE VISIBLE: A CALL FOR A STRONGER POST COVID-19 AGENDA"

1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The United Nations Decade of Persons with Disabilities was held from 1983 to 1992 to enable Governments and organizations to implement measures to improve the lives of Persons with Disabilities all over the world. On October 14, 1992, as this decade drew to a close, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 3rd December as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities. This day was first observed on December 3, 1992.

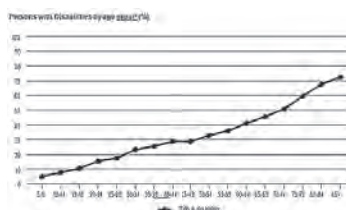
Every 3rd December, Uganda joins the rest of the world to celebrate the International Day for Persons with Disabilities and acknowledge the capabilities of Persons with Disabilities in contributing towards the development of the country.

The Day is also commemorated to create awareness on the importance of promoting equality and full participation of Persons with Disabilities in social life as well as development. Through this Day, Government takes stock of the achievements made in serving Persons with Disabilities, the challenges encountered and comes up with a way forward for serving them better.

2.0 THE SITUATION ANALYSIS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN UGANDA

According to the Persons with Disabilities Act 2020, disability is defined as permanent and substantial functional limitation of daily life activities caused by physical, mental, sensory impairments and environmental barriers resulting from limited participation.

2.1 Demography



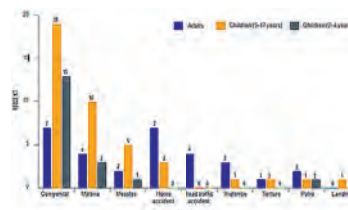
Source: UBOS-(UFDS 2017)

According to the UBOS Disability monography analytical report of 2019/20, using 2014 data, Disability prevalence stand at 14% (15% Female & 12% Male). The proportion of persons who reported difficulty in seeing was the highest at 6.4% compared to other categories of disabilities. Lango sub-region (20%) and Acholi sub-region (17%) had the highest prevalence while Kampala (7%) had the lowest disability prevalence.

According to the UBOS Disability monography report of 2019/20, multiple disabilities (where majority of invisible categories of disability fall), constitute 36% (1.4 million) of Persons with Disabilities. Disability was found to increase significantly with age, and disability among people aged 85 years and above was found to be at 71%.

2.2 Causes of Disability in Uganda.

The UBOS functional disability survey (UFDS 2017) also identified key causes of Disability as; accidents at home being the highest for adults at (7%), malaria (4%) and road traffic accidents (4%). For children aged 2 to 17 years, the most common causes were congenital (i.e., from birth) or because of sickness such as malaria (10%) and measles (5%) as illustrated in the figure below;



Source: (UBOS UFDS) 2017

2.3 Poverty and Disability

Poverty and disability are closely interlinked. Disability is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Disability exposes people to limited livelihood opportunities which consequently lead them into a state of poverty and vulnerability. The socio- economic situation of the majority of persons with disabilities is characterized by abject poverty.

Despite the Government development interventions that have been put in place to enable Persons with Disabilities improve their livelihoods, they have reported challenges in accessing these programmes due to ignorance on the rights and the needs of Persons with Disabilities and their role in contributing to the development of the nation. To combat this vice, the Ministry developed disability inclusive guidelines for all the development programs under her mandate.

In the same way, the MGLSD is carrying out awareness campaigns to all the different Ministries, Departments, Agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that all their programming and budgeting is inclusive of Persons with Disabilities.

3.0 THEME FOR INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2021

The Global theme for this year is "Leadership and

Participation of Persons with Disabilities, Towards an Inclusive, Accessible and sustainable Post COVID19". The domesticated/national theme is "Not All Disabilities Are Visible: A Call for a Stronger Post COVID19 Agenda" This was purposefully selected to draw attention to the fact that many times invisible disabilities (hydrocephalus, Autism, Mental disability, albinism, down syndrome, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, multiple disabilities etc.) are seldom accorded the due attention like the visible ones (e.g. blindness, physical disability).

This theme also embraces the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose theme is "Leaving No One Behind". The theme underscores the importance of inclusion and eliminates obstacles in protection and promotion of the rights Persons with Disabilities so as to protect them against discrimination

The domestication of the global theme is based on the fact that Uganda is doing well promoting participation of Persons with Disabilities in governance and development programmes through provision of affirmative action in programmes, but can do better in terms amplification of many categories of disabilities that have been either forgotten or are not known by the public.

Like other countries, Uganda is known to amplify common disabilities such as physical, hearing, and visual. Leaving out many other categories such as mental, albinism, deaf-blind, Down-syndrome, multiple, cerebral palsy, etc.

This year's theme therefore, calls on all stakeholders to ensure that Persons with Disabilities are wholly included in several interventions across the different sectors.

This year's theme is in line with the principle of 'inclusion as highlighted in our NDP111, NRM manifesto, among other frameworks. This vision is demonstrated under many programs such as the National Special Grant Persons with Disabilities for empowerment of persons with disabilities. The beneficiaries have many transformative testimonies on how the Special Grant has pulled them from a sorry state, and now they are able to sit and discuss with other community members. People with Disabilities are also able to start small business to earn income for survival and hence are now recognized as useful citizens. The beneficiaries state that this is a big paradigm shift in their lives because they were previously looked at as outcasts and dependants that were not expected to contribute to economic development.

4.0 SPECIFIC PROGRAMS TARGETING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

4.1 National Disability Special Grant

Increase of the Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities. As part of affirmative action to capacitate People with Disabilities access other programs easily, Government increased the Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities from UGX5BN in FY2020/21 to

UGX9.6BN in FY2021/22. During the last financial year, the Ministry managed to disburse grants to 834 PWD Households to start income generating activities. In this FY2021/22, the Ministry will disburse grants to 1,535 PWD Households of which 780 households have already received the grants in the 1st and 2nd Quarters. The demand for the grant is high yet the budget is limited. The plan is to raise the budget of the grant to UGX16.15Bn. This will enable us reach 24,00 households targeting 36,000 Persons with Disabilities who need support to start income generating activities

4.2 10% allocation to PWDs under the Parish Development Model.

As part of the wealth creation development models, GOU has designed a Parish Development Model targeting different interest groups at parish level. As part of this development agenda a deliberate allocation of 10% has been set aside for PWDs.

4.3 Category 18 under the Beneficiary categories for Emyooga Fund.

Besides the 10% allocation under PDM, the Emyooga program design also specifically provides for PWDs as category to benefit from the skills based program

4.4 Midterm NSSF access at 40 years for PWDs and 50% of entitlement.

Among other several affirmative action interventions by Government (tax waivers on Vehicles, additional points at University education level scolarship). Government has in principle agreed that pwds can access solution of their NSSF benefits at 40 years under the recent amendments to the NSSF Act, while other members access 20% at 45 years. This is an interventio to mitigate economic effectsof COVID19.

4.5 Vocational Rehabilitation Training

The Vocational Rehabilitation and training program under the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development equips Persons with Disabilities with employable skills on a yearly basis. Currently, there are five centres operating namely, Ruti in Mbarara, Kireka, Lweza, Mpumudde in Jinja and Ocoke in Arua. These centres train youth in vocational skills like carpentry, metal fabrications, food science, nursery teaching, and cosmetology among others. The Ministry is in the process of restructuring the courses to support the emerging market needs and skills expectations from Youth with Disabilities.

4.6 Community Based Rehabilitation Programme.

The Program was rolled out to the country in the financial 2018/2019, up from 26 districts which were implementing it previously. This program targets PWDs in their families and communities for rehabilitation, equalization of opportunities through poverty reduction, access to education, health and social inclusion of Persons with disabilities.

4.7 Disability Management Information System

In a bid to consolidate disability disaggregated data collection and analysis, the ministry has developed the disability management information system. The system will capture data on all disability aspects and will facilitate monitoring and evaluation of government programmes for persons with disabilities.

MINISTRY OF GENDER, LABOUR AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

5.0 CHALLENGES

- Government is aware of the challenges Persons with Disabilities face in accessibility in relation to services, such as education, health, the physical environment and information among others. Many of these issues were included in Persons with Disabilities' Act 2020. In the same way, the Building Control Act also detail physical accessibility issues. There are also the Accessibility Standards in place to cater for Persons with Disabilities which were developed, and being disseminated to various stakeholders to ensure that there is improvement in accessing physical environment.
- The National Disability Special Grant allocations needs to be doubled to take care of the overwhelming demand for the Grant and to cover the 31 districts that

are yet to benefit from the National level Grant.

- Skilling of Youth with Disabilities require substantial investments in the rehabilitation of all the five regional vocational rehabilitation centres and equipping them to effectively produce quality for the market, thereby contributing to the employment of PWDs.

6.0 NEXT STEPS AND WAY FORWARD

- The Ministry will intensify its engagement with different stakeholders in the mainstreaming of the issues of Persons with invisible Disabilities in all their interventions.
- Government will strive to highlight the needs for invisible disabilities under all sectors especially education, health, justice, etc. in the delivery of services.

- The MGLSD will work with Ministry of Public Service to regularize recruitment and deployment of Sign Language Interpreters in Government institutions.
- MGLSD will engage MOH to revive regional workshops for assistive devices
- MGLSD will engage MFPED to provide for a financial gap of 16.15 Billion (to reach 61 unfunded districts and 1600 unfunded groups of PWDs) under the Disability special Grant so as to address the special empowerment needs of PWDs.
- MGLSD to strengthen regional Vocational Rehabilitation centres, sheltered workshops and resettlement centres, to support PWDs and train over 500 targeted Youth with Disabilities.
- MGLSD will engage MOES to establish additional schools for special needs education especially in

Northern and Western region.

- Disseminate the PWDs related policies and laws including regulations to the PWD Act 2020, so to enhance rights protection and service delivery.
- MGLSD to revive Quarterly Disability inclusion & Development coordination meetings to map out stakeholders, develop a referral directory, etc. for effective delivery.
- MGLSD to spearhead review & presentation on regional and global commitments (February 2022 summit in Norway, UN CRPD report in 2022, etc.), in consultation with stakeholders.
- Rollout the disability movement information system to streamline jobs collection of PWDs

Message from the Minister of State for Disability



Hon. Asamo Hellen
Minister of State for
Disability Affairs

On 3rd December, Uganda joins the rest of the world to commemorate International Day of Persons with disabilities. The theme for this day is "Leadership and participation of Persons with Disabilities, towards an inclusive, accessible and sustainable post COVID19". Due to strict COVID19 measures, the day will be celebrated at the state house with President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni gracing the event at state house Entebbe, Vision group talks to the state minister for Gender, Labour and social Development Hon. Asamo Hellen Grace about the day and this is what she had to say.

Why we take part of the celebration
We all know Uganda is a member of the United General Assembly which was declared on 3rd December as an International Day for Persons with Disabilities.

According to Hon Asamo the day is intended to recognise the capabilities of persons with Disabilities; promote equality and full participation of Persons with Disabilities in socio-economic and political development initiatives. And on this day the government takes stock of what has been achieved, gaps and way forward.

On the relevance of the theme, Hon. minister says away from the international theme, the ministry has zeroed down to a common theme "Not all disabilities are Visible: A Call for a Stronger Post Covid19 Agenda".

"The purpose for this is to draw attention to the fact that many times invisible disabilities

are seldom accorded due attention like the visible ones," says adding that Uganda is also doing well in terms of participation of persons with Disabilities in leadership, and can still do better in terms of amplification of many categories of disabilities that have been either forgotten or not known by the public.

Hon. Minister also says the day is such an opportunity to carry out advocacy towards provision of services that are disability inclusive.

"As Government, we are taking stock of programs that will be implemented to promote the rights and equal opportunities for the invisible disabilities, the existing gaps make commitment for improvement," she adds.

What is Government doing

In order to ensure meaningful inclusion, Visibility and support, the Government has come up with several programs such as prevention of disability through immunization programs, early detection through training of health workers and parents, enactment of favorable legal framework.

"We have also ensured public awareness rising on the prevention and management of disabilities including invisible disabilities," she says.

She further explains that the Government has also embarked on empowering persons with disabilities and their caregivers, guardians by providing a special grant. "We have also made sure that PWDs

are included in the mainstream economic empowerment programs such as parish model development among others," she adds.

"Some of the works we celebrate on this day include political representation from Village to parliamentary level," she says Asamo adds that they have also come up with statutory bodies such as the district service commission, Uganda communications Commission, and councils of public Universities among others which have made it easy in terms of service provision for PWDs.

"Government has also come out to support PWDs in education by offering admissions to public Universities and other tertiary institutions of learning for students who meet the requirements," she says explaining that the ministry further has offered a special grant worth sh9.6b which is meant for economic empowerment and job creation among PWDs

"We have also established five regional vocational rehabilitation centers across the country to skill mainly youth with disabilities," she affirms.

In terms of NSSF benefits, the ministry has made it a mandate that PWDs should access their funds at 40years which is not the same uniform for all Ugandans.

In taking part of the 2022 Disability Summit in Oslo Norway, the Minister asserts that the Ministry is in a process of setting up an inter-Ministerial committee focusing on education,

inclusive employment and livelihood, access to education, climate change, humanitarian action and all cross cutting issues of gender, engaging organizations of persons with disabilities among other.

On protecting the rights of people with disabilities the minister says the government protects the rights of all citizens Irrespective of color, region, ethnicity, disability or age and this was the case during COVID19 lockdown.

However, for special interest groups including persons with disabilities, the government through the constitution of 1995, persons with disabilities act 2020, the NDP111, NRM manifesto and frameworks has put in place a number of opportunities for them. Government has also distributed educational materials (brailled Materials) for blind students.

On access to health services, PWDs have always been given priority across all government health facilities. We are also having interministerial talks to improve the functionality of the orthopedic workshops including those at regional and the national referral hospital to provide free and low cost assistive devices.

The minister further reminds the country to always provide necessary support to people living with Disabilities so as to enable them realize their full potential and live a dignified life in society through awareness raising, skills training, provision of care, provision of basic needs, social protection among others.

UGANDA TO COMMEMORATE PWDS DAY

INVISIBLE DISABILITIES ARE SELDOM ACCORDED DUE ATTENTION LIKE THE VISIBLE ONES

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS AS EVERYONE ELSE

Protracted isolation and disruptions in services and routines due to COVID-19 have imposed extra burdens on persons with disabilities, who report that the pandemic response falls far short on accessibility. Not only must we continue to dismantle long-standing barriers; we also need to work harder to ensure that existing gains are not lost, and that we accelerate progress, including in advancing access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Persons with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else, as affirmed in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. All countries, including Uganda, should have fully inclusive sexual and

reproductive health policies and services for persons with disabilities. These must redress current yawning gaps, for example, in access to contraceptives or even basic gynaecological care.

And our efforts to end gender-based violence must address the acute vulnerabilities that put women and girls with disabilities at greater risk of violence.



Dr. Mary Otieno
UNFPA Representative

UNITED NATIONS HAS PURSUED THE ADVANCEMENT OF THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS OF ALL CATEGORIES

Since its inception, in 1948, the United Nations has pursued the advancement of the rights of persons of all categories including persons with disabilities in society and development in close collaboration with Member States, Civil Society Organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector at national, regional and international levels. Remarkable progress has been made over the past decades in the United Nations' endeavors to advance the rights of persons with disabilities, including in Uganda.

The United Nations' commitment to promote the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities as agents of change and beneficiaries of development has been translated into concrete action. For example, Uganda has made significant efforts in addressing discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, through a number of strategies including the Persons with Disabilities Act 2020, the National Comprehensive Action Plan on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2020-2024) which all resonate

with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that urges the removal of barriers and making concrete differences for and with persons with disabilities in order to be empowered, lead positive changes in their lives and communities.

These will serve as useful tools for decision making for Ministries, Departments and Agencies in their work to design evidence-based policies that leave no one behind,

especially persons with invisible disabilities. I want to particularly applaud the engagement by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development with Disability Persons Organisations in Uganda, which has been instrumental in advocating for equality and inclusion of invisible disabilities in their program

UN Human Rights Country Representative.



Robert Ayeda Kotchani
UN Human Rights Country Representative

BAKATEYAMBA HOME ALWAYS THERE FOR PWDS

By Juliet Lukwago

As we mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities today, Mapeera Bakateyamba's home at Nalukolongo in Kampala has been a Good Samaritan for persons with disability, the elderly and destitute for over four decades.

The mission of the home has always been to offer hope and friendly services to the disadvantaged persons in the community without discrimination, following in the steps of the Biblical Good Samaritan.

Mapeera Bakateyamba home is run by the Good Samaritan Sisters and was founded by Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga in 1975. Nsubuga was inspired after a number of visits to similar homes in Europe that offered services to the needy.

"What Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga dreamt of while in England in 1975 eventually became reality here. We take care of persons with disabilities," Sister Lawrence

OVER THE YEARS, THE HOME HAS ACCOMMODATED OVER 5,000 PEOPLE FROM UGANDA AND BEYOND

mentoring, formal and informal education at different levels. Their aim is to transform people under their care into better members of society.

According to Nakiwu, Good Samaritan Sisters follow Christ's example of serving the poor and disadvantaged.

"Our vision is reaching out indiscriminately to the needy in society. And our motto is: "Be a good Samaritan," she said.

She says a person who wants to live in the home has to apply through a parish or local council authority to enable their administrator or social worker assess the applicant's suitability for support. The applicant's form is then presented to management for approval. Thereafter the applicant becomes either a temporary or permanent resident.

The congregation relies on recommendations from the different churches, probation offices, Police, schools, hospitals and other nuns who encounter the needy. The sisters assess candidates and make their

decisions based on their needs. While the home was built to accommodate 100 residents, it currently has 78 residents and 13 staff.

The original Mapeera Bakateyamba home started off with 10 persons with disabilities, but was later overwhelmed with over 100 displaced persons following the 1979 war.

"We are interested in the quality of people's retirement. Also, we appreciate the work provided by Mapeera Bakateyamba's Home of the Elderly and recognise the challenges the administration faces," she says.

Nakiwu says the home currently has limited space and faces feeding challenges and appeals for support from Good Samaritans and the Government.

"We take care of people from different faiths and we do not force them to convert because we are serving the same God. Ours is to give holistic support," Nakiwu said.



A nun helping an elderly at Mapeera Bakateyamba's home. PWDS are also catered for at the home

GOV'T TO GIVE SH9.6B TO PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES



Emily Ajiambo
Assistant Commissioner Disability & Elderly Affairs

Today, 3rd December, Uganda joins the rest of the world to commemorate the International Day for Persons with Disabilities under the Global theme is "Leadership and Participation of Persons with Disabilities, Towards an Inclusive, Accessible and sustainable Post COVID19". The domesticated/national theme is "Not All Disabilities Are Visible: A Call for a stronger post COVID19 Agenda". This was purposefully selected to draw attention to the fact that many times invisible disabilities Government has set aside Shs 9.6Bn as the Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities across the Country. New Vision talks to the Assistant Commissioner Disability and Elderly at the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development Ms. Emily Ajiambo about the Special Grant which is aimed at benefiting 12,800 households.

How best do you describe and categorize Persons with Disabilities?

The Persons with Disability Act 2020 defines disability as, "A substantial functional limitation of a person's daily life activities caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment and environment barriers, resulting in limited participation in society on equal basis with others and includes an impairment specified in Schedule 3 of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2020.

1. Physical Disability caused by cerebral palsy, amputation of a limb, paralysis or deformity.
2. Hearing disability including deafness and hard of hearing disability.
3. Visual disability including blindness and low vision disability.
4. Deaf and blind disability.
5. Mental disability including psychiatric disability and learning disability.
6. Little people.
7. Albinism.
8. Multiple Disabilities

Please tell us more about the grant

The Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities is a Government programme that provides grants to Persons with Disabilities to start income generating activities in a bid to boost their household incomes.

Why the grant?

14% of Uganda's population aged 2 years and above are Persons with Disabilities. Living with a disability comes with individual, social histories and exclusion which act as barriers to accessing livelihoods and employment. For example, only up-to 9% of all Persons with Disabilities are able to complete primary education while only 6% of them are able to complete secondary education. This situation curtails access to employment, skills and livelihoods hence perpetuating poverty and vulnerability in view of the above. Government introduced the Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities to prepare and groom Persons with Disabilities to acquire basic survival skills, reduce vulnerability and exclusion from society, for equitable national development. These funds are accessed through groups of Persons with Disabilities.

What is the composition of the PWD group and how much is provided per group?

The minimum number is 5 members and maximum is 15 members for each group. Each group receives a maximum of 5 Million but the funding varies from the enterprise selected and for homes taking care of persons with disabilities are funded up to a maximum of 10 Million

How many districts are we looking at for the start?

The Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities is a country wide programme targeting all Local Governments. This Financial year, we are targeting 1,600 Persons with Disabilities Groups benefiting 12,800 households across the country. We believe that with time we shall have more persons with disabilities engaged in income generation to boost their household incomes and reduce dependency.

What processes have you put in place to ensure that the grant reaches the right people?

The beneficiaries of this grant should first of all be Persons with Disabilities or their caregivers because we

know that there are other people with severe disabilities who need support to engage in income generation.

The Grant guidelines stipulate the steps taken to access the funds and this begins with expression of interest by the Persons with Disabilities who are supported by the Parish Chiefs and Community Development Officers to fill the application form. To reduce bureaucracy, all the information needed from the group is embedded within the application form.

The Sub-County Community Development Officer assisted by the PWD Councillor vets the groups to ensure that indeed they are residents of the area and after vetting these groups is submitted to the District which further vets the groups.

The District then submits the PWD Group to the Ministry for funding with the full documentation of beneficiaries in each group bearing photographs of the group members.

The Ministry then conducts a physical verification of the groups in their localities before the funds can be disbursed directly to the Persons with Disabilities Bank accounts.

Persons with Disabilities have challenges getting National Identification Cards, how are you addressing this?

We understand this has been a general outcry not only to Persons with Disabilities however, we are not using this as an impediment to access the grant, we are requesting the beneficiaries to at least provide primary data like area of residence, we get the passport photographs among other relevant details.

In case beneficiaries with severe and multiple disabilities, how are they accessing the grant?

The grant is also targeting caregivers, for instance we support group of parents of children with disabilities and also homes that take care of abandoned children

What has the Ministry done to ensure persons with disabilities get COVID 19 Jobs

As we all know, some disabilities come with respiratory challenges which make Persons with Disabilities very prone to acquiring COVID 19. As a result, these have been prioritized for vaccination. We are engaging our community leaders to mobilize PWDs for vaccination.