



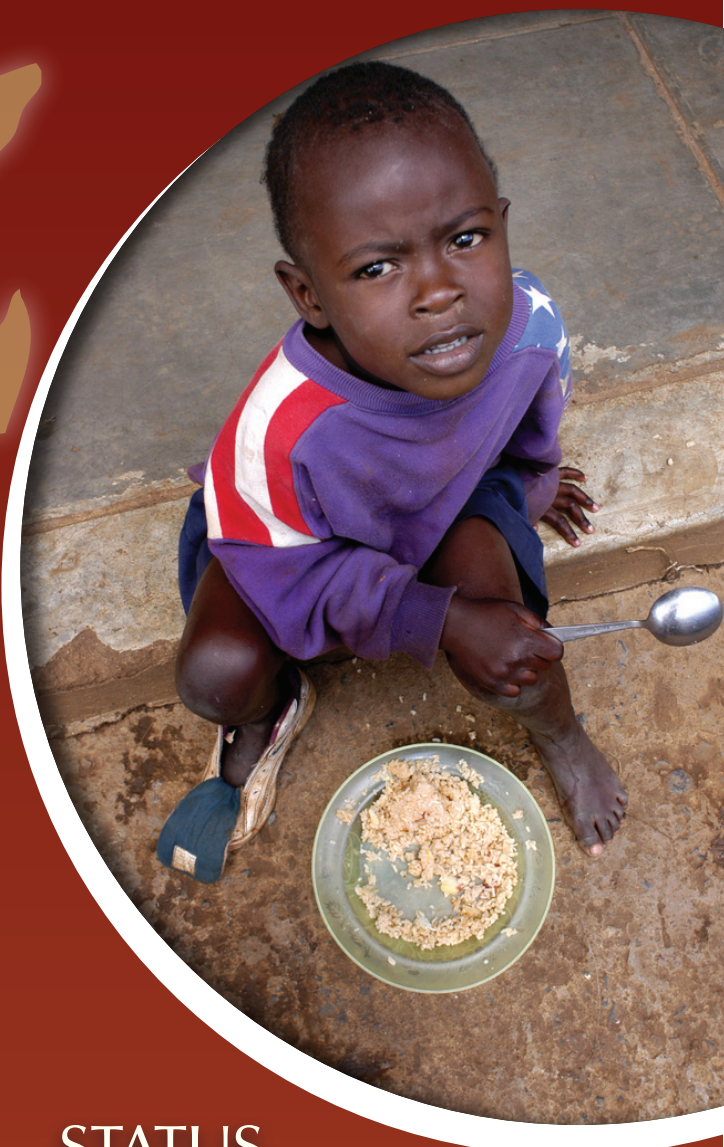
of Persons with Disabilities

# African Disability News

September 2011



ROUNDTABLE TO DEVELOP THE NEW CONTINENTAL DISABILITY -  
STRATEGY FOR THE AFRICAN DECADE OF PERSONS WITH -  
DISABILITIES 2010-2019.



STATUS  
OF DISABLED PERSONS LIVES  
IN FOOD CRISIS  
**WORRYING!**

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pg12

◀ **DO NOT PAMPER YOUR  
DISABLED CHILD**

THE SECRETARIAT OF AFRICAN DECADE  
WELCOMES WORLD DISABILITY REPORT

pg10



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## DPI 8th World Assembly comes to South Africa



Disabled Peoples' International  
8th World Assembly  
Durban International Convention Centre  
South Africa  
10 - 13 October 2011

For More information [www.dpi.org](http://www.dpi.org)



A K Dube  
Chief Executive Officer

## LETTER FROM THE CEO

The past year has seen the apparition and interest in the disability movement through the implementation of legal instruments to protect human rights of women, children, and men with disability. Persons with disabilities are now fully aware that dignity and the equal and alienable rights of all members of the human family are necessary for society to realize the values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

With the ever-present security, food, economic, and human rights issues faced in the world today, it is vital for the disability movement to stay focused and reinforce our prerogatives to advocate for the human rights of people with disabilities. With that I present to you this issue of the “African Disability News”.

A. Kudakwashe Dube

## AFRICAN COMMISSION RETHINKS AFRICAN DISABILITY PROTOCOL



During the 49th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) held in Banjul, the Gambia, the Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (SADPD) and the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA) convened a civil society meeting to deliberate on the new mandate creating the African Union Working Group on the Rights of Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities.

The consultation meeting followed a series of Roundtables that mobilized African disability rights groups, experts, and partners in the areas of disability rights sectors, for strategic and long-term engagement with the

Working Group and the regional human rights initiatives. The meeting was convened while supporting the overarching call to increase representation and greater participation of civil society organisations at the ACHPR.

The meeting was able to build regional solidarity on disability rights and human rights in the context of the rights of persons with disabilities towards participation, consultation, and access to information. This galvanized support from other network groups working in the areas of women rights, children rights, HIV/AIDS and health rights in the region.

Following the meeting, a civil society reference group was established to track and inform the members of the Working Group on disability issues and influence the execution of its mandate. The reference group will be coordinated by the SADPD and will work closely in preparing civil society submissions on critical areas of concern to be addressed by the African Commission and other relevant regional human rights bodies tasked with investigating disability rights.



# BUILDING A **BARRIER-FREE** ENVIRONMENT FOR THE DISABLED - A WAKE UP FOR GHANAIS

By Seth K Addi

Ghana is among the few countries in Africa that has taken an affirmative action in favour of marginalised groups with a focus on persons with disabilities. These efforts have resulted in laws and policies promoting equality, inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in society.

In 1996 the Government of the Republic of Ghana developed the National Disability Policy leading to the passage on the National Disability Law, Act 715 of 2006, aimed at promoting and enhancing equal opportunities while seeking the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities irrespective of gender, age, or type of disability.

However, advocacy, implementation and supervision of disability programmes are severely lacking. Accessibility is one of the key elements addressed in these policies and laws. Due to limited enforcement of disability laws, absence of National Accessibility Standards and lack of knowledge about the rights of persons with disabilities, laws and policies on accessibility have been largely overlooked.

## What is accessibility?

Accessibility entails understanding its relation to areas of life beyond just the physical environment. Areas that are often overlooked are access to services, information, and communication services, which are an integral part of making a barrier-free society, and addressing the accessibility needs of persons with sensory, intellectual, and psychosocial disabilities as well. These aspects should be addressed in a set of complementary standards.

The environment in Ghana is not barrier-free. It does not allow for easy and safe movement, function or access for all, regardless of age, sex or physical condition. Access by all to physical

spaces and to services is not possible without obstacles, which leads to loss of dignity and independence.

These beliefs recognize that persons with disabilities can live to their full potential given the same conditions and opportunities. The national disability policy, Act 715, the 1992 Republican Constitution, and other legal legislations also provide for accessibility not only for persons with disabilities but also for elderly persons, the sick, pregnant women, and those carrying heavy loads.

Despite the efforts of the government to establish a conducive environment for participation of Persons with Disabilities in all spheres of life, there are still difficulties in terms of accessing the physical infrastructure; as most buildings do not have facilities such as ramps, lifts, and so on.

Some of the existing accessibility facilities are not designed according to the required Accessibility Standards, and as a result, persons with disabilities continue to face difficulties in accessing them. This leads to discrimination, a violation of the rights of persons with disabilities, and a deliberate impediment to the disabled to exhibit their full potential to contribute to the development of Ghana and Africa.

## People affected by accessibility barriers:

People who use wheelchairs,  
People with limited walking/movement abilities,  
People with visual impairment or low vision,  
People with hearing impairments,  
People with intellectual disabilities,  
People with psychosocial disabilities,  
Elderly persons,  
Pregnant women and People with temporary disabilities

## The need for Accessibility Standards

To the best of my knowledge one of the cardinal reasons why it has been very difficult to implement the legal provisions on accessibility is the absence of Accessibility Standards to guide architects, property developers, policy makers and implementers on the accessibility requirements in the physical environment during the design and implementation of construction projects.

The goal of the Accessibility Standards is to contribute to improving equal access for persons with disabilities, in order to enable them to live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life. Other goals include:

- Developing blueprints that create an accessible physical environment.
- Providing a tool for measurement and auditing of accessibility of the environment.

The Standards are intended for use by a variety of stakeholders, including those that:

- Develop laws, policies and regulations e.g Parliament and line ministries.
- Build and implement changes in the physical environment such as architects, contractors, engineers and those who own or operate public infrastructure or services like the banks, churches and other service providers.

## ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DIFFERENT DISABILITIES

The principal targets for these Standards are people with different disabilities. In order to harmonize between the accessibility needs of different groups, there is need to have a proper understanding of these needs which differ from one disability to another.

### People who use wheelchairs

Many accessibility requirements relate to dimensions and other aspects of wheelchairs. In order to achieve a complete turn with the wheelchair, it is necessary to provide an unobstructed circle with a minimum diameter of 1.50m.

Considerable energy is required to propel a

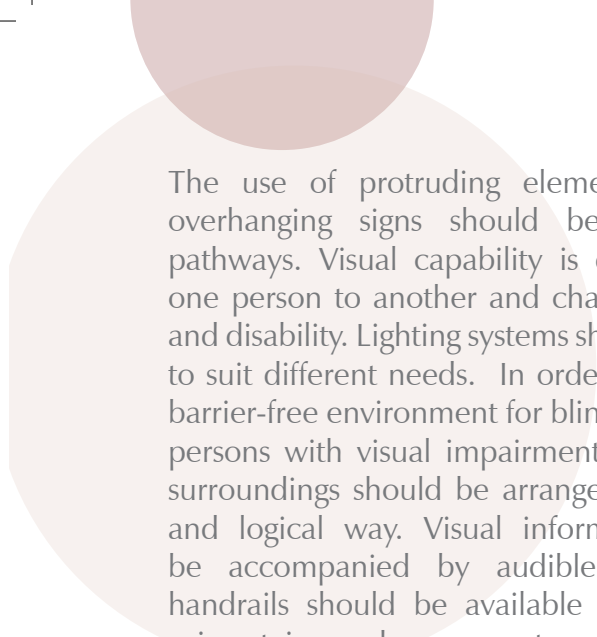
wheelchair manually up ramps, over changes in level and over soft or uneven surfaces. Therefore the Standards address those aspects in particular. Resistance between the floor and the wheelchair wheels depends on the floor surface of the pathway - whether it is even or uneven, firm or loose. Changes in levels should be avoided and the floor surface should be hard, even and slip resistant. People with movement difficulties may use crutches or sticks. Special attention must be paid to avoid broken, rough or sloping floor surfaces and surfaces that become particularly slippery after rainfall, such as wood covering, granite, hard burnt bricks, gravel and Murom.

The following aspects are important to enable independent movement for people using wheelchairs and other assistive devices:

- Changes in levels should be avoided.
- Floor surfaces should be hard, even and slip resistant.
- Rails should be provided on stairs and ramps.
- Ramps should have resting places and have a low slope along travel routes.
- Pathways should have a limited slope and include an adequate turning radius.
- Doors should be light and easy to turn, and entrances should be sufficiently wide.
- Parking space should be close to the main entrance.
- Furniture, counters, equipment, power sockets, and plugs should be placed at suitable heights that are reachable by persons who use wheelchairs.
- Handrails should be easy to grasp.

### Persons with visual impairments

For blind persons and persons with visual impairments, orientation can be eased by the use of contrasting colours and changes in the texture of the floor material. This helps a blind person in identifying doors, stairs, steps, ramps and pedestrian crossings. The path of travel should be easy to detect by a blind person using a long white cane. A guide strip with a contrasting floor texture running parallel to the main pathway should be used for this purpose.



The use of protruding elements and low overhanging signs should be avoided in pathways. Visual capability is different from one person to another and changes with age and disability. Lighting systems should be made to suit different needs. In order to provide a barrier-free environment for blind persons and persons with visual impairment, the physical surroundings should be arranged in a simple and logical way. Visual information should be accompanied by audible information, handrails should be available to grip when using stairs, and ramps, entrances, stairs, and information boards should be well lighted. Blind persons should be aided by tactile and auditory information. Therefore, written information should be made available in braille and visual information should be accompanied by audible information.

#### Persons with hearing impairments

People with hearing impairments may experience difficulty in distinguishing words and sounds in noisy environments. Therefore, rooms should be acoustically insulated.

Supplementary visual information should be provided for deaf persons and persons with hearing impairments, such as visual information at airports and bus stations, and alarms and bells in lifts.

#### People with learning or intellectual disabilities

Some people with learning or intellectual disabilities experience difficulties in understanding or interpreting information like signs, and in distinguishing between different colours or between left or right.

The following design elements will enable people experiencing these difficulties to physically access the built environment:

Simple designs with clear and unambiguous sign postings;

Use of signs and notice boards with pictures and symbols;

Separations of a mass of information into a numerous signs so that can be more easily read.

#### Other Groups

In addition to enabling access to persons with disabilities, the Accessibility Standards should also ensure access to other groups, such as elderly persons, pregnant women, people and children with temporary disabilities, and people carrying heavy or cumbersome luggage. In short, accessibility benefits all persons and the Standards ensure a barrier-free environment for all people include the possibility of adjustments from low to strong light.

Despite the efforts of the government, the Ghana Federation of the Disabled and its partner, the Network of Journalists for the Promotion of the Rights of persons with Disability in Africa (PROMOAFRICA), and other Disable People Organisations, believe that the Ghanaian government should establish a conducive environment for participation of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life to prevent the continuation of Persons with Disabilities facing difficulties in terms of accessing the physical infrastructure. Most buildings do not have facilities such as ramps, lifts, and so on. Some of the existing accessibility facilities are not designed according to the required Accessibility Standards, and as a result, persons with disabilities continue to face difficulties in accessing them. The responsibility lies on us as citizens to help build a better environment for all persons living in this overflowing continent called Africa.

*The author is the president of the Network of Journalists for the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disability in Africa (PROMOAFRICA) and the managing editor of the Evening Tribune newspaper in Ghana. Email.promoafrika@gmail.com tel.233 267457253*



El Ghassim Wane

## El Ghassim Wane Proved His Words

*Signing of the MoU between the AU  
Commission & SADPD Regional Office*

**On June 6 2011, the African Union Peace & Security Department (AU PSD) & the SADPD East Africa Regional Office officially signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to implement a disability inclusive peace and security project.**

The African Consultative Conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in April 2010, discussed and deliberated on important disability issues. In particular, the disability inclusive peace & security initiative captured the attention of the audience. It instituted a new programme area taking hold of the AU PSD as a primary partner. El Ghassim Wane (*Director of the AU PSD*), in his speech about the possibility of disability mainstreaming in the AU peace & security operation, stated to the audience:

*“ Even though I will bring the issue to the attention of my colleagues, we are guided by you, tell us exactly how you want it to be, we can forward you all of our policy documents, if they are not disability friendly alter them to fit your needs, mainstream all disability issues...”*

Encouraged by his positive well-toned remark, a concept note was formulated & later developed into a full project proposal. The preparation of the project proposal fell into the hands of the regional office and involved consultation with SADPD & Swedish Organisations of Persons with disabilities International Aid Association (Shia). For this purpose; the Swedish Embassy in Addis Ababa, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and Shia made worthwhile contribution without which success would have been far from reach.

Although this MoU is a first step in building a sustainable peace and security programme, the AU, the highest umbrella institution in the continent, has clearly recognized disability as one major cross cutting issue. They have proven their commitment by making their policy documents disability inclusive. This is a sign of vital importance and a step forward for the disability movement in Africa. Let us work together for this exciting disability inclusive programme that has secured direct partnership with the African Union.

*Author: Ariam Gebremariam*



## THE ACTIVITIES OF THE FAMILY AND THE GOVERNMENT UNDERMINING THE EDUCATION OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Prior to the 1940's, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), especially those with sensory disabilities, hardly had access to formal education. This was as a result of the absence of the requisite facilities and personnel to undertake the training of PWDs. Perhaps one major benefit of Western education influence on formal education in Africa was its accompanying introduction of education for PWDs.

In 1945, the first special school for the blind was established at Akropong-Akuapem in the Eastern Region of Ghana, which opened the way for the establishment of other special schools for PWDs later on. Since then, the education of PWDs has improved over the years. Currently, there are more than 20 schools, both special and integrated, for PWDs at all levels. There are PWDs who have managed to successfully go up the education ladder, having been integrated into various sectors of the country's development. This notwithstanding, there are multiple activities from the family, and for that matter, the community and government that continue to hinder the education of PWDs. These activities range from severely negative attitudes, to ostracizing, to the failure to provide adequate and appropriate learning facilities. Although these activities contravene some sections of the Ghanaian Persons with Disabilities Act 2006, people commit such contraventions with impunity, as the law has been silent ever since it was passed.

As the Persons with Disability Act 2006 stipulates, parents and families are allowed to enroll their school-age children with a disability in school. Contrary to this, some families keep their children with disabilities indoors, either for a very long time, or in extreme cases, all throughout their life. By doing so, their human rights, not only to education, but also their right to movement and to a social life, are denied. Parents keep their children with disabilities

indoors out of ignorance, discrimination, and a fear of being stigmatized or shunned by the community. Those who keep their children with disabilities indoors out of ignorance do so because they are unaware of the potential of these children. They assume that a child with a disability has no opportunity for success and is incapable of achieving anything positive in his or her future. Many lack information about the existence of special schools for Persons with Disabilities, and thus how the potentials and talents of their child can be unearthed.

Another reason why some parents keep their children with disabilities in the house is because of discrimination. Such parents give much attention to the education of their able-bodied children at the expense of those children with disabilities. Although some of these parents may be aware of the existence of special schools for Persons with Disabilities, they believe that it is their able-bodied child who can attain the highest level of education, get better employment, and help the family in future.

Finally, some families isolate their relatives with disabilities from social life in order to avoid communal and societal stigmatization. This is because in some Ghanaian communities it is unprestigious to give birth to a child with disabilities, and parents with such children are either accused of being possessed with certain demonic spirits or their children's disabilities are perceived to be the consequences of the sins of the family. These and other community-related inhibitions account for the inability of many families to enroll their children with disabilities in school. The effect of this is that some of these children, after being kept indoors for a long time, become "socially dead." They lose their motor skills and also demonstrate delays in their cognitive abilities.

Even if they are enrolled in special schools for



persons with disabilities, they are unable to relate to their peers, and subsequently drop out of school. And in extreme cases, in their quest for survival, they become beggars on the street. Consequently, their potentials and talents have been shattered, in some cases for years and in others, forever.

On the other hand, the failure of the government to provide the necessary facilities needed to meet the educational needs of persons with disabilities is also a major issue. Below are some of challenges faced by persons with disabilities from basic to tertiary levels of education. Although there are a number of special schools for PWDs at the basic level, there is the problem of inadequate learning facilities. Thus these special schools do not have enough learning equipment like Braille books, hearing aids, audio materials and others needed to ensure smooth teaching and learning. This makes teaching and learning very difficult as compared to students without disabilities in regular schools.

Again, these special schools are not only under-staffed but also lack the requisite trained personnel needed to ensure the effective running of these special schools. Perhaps the most outstanding has to do with the inability of these special schools to admit more Persons with Disabilities of school-going age. For example, the two special schools for the blind in Akropong and Wa, in the Eastern and Upper West Regions of Ghana respectively, all together cannot accommodate more than six hundred (600) students. This is due to a lack of accommodations and classroom facilities necessary for the use of persons with disabilities. Also, most of the regular schools are not accessible to persons with physical disabilities. In Ghana, only 6% of children with disabilities receive any basic education at all. Problems at the Secondary and Tertiary levels are almost the same: inadequate support services, learning materials, resource persons and resource rooms continue to inadequately provide access to education for Persons with Disabilities. There is also the absence of Special Education personnel, like itinerant and peripatetic teachers, offering special assistance

and advice to instructors.

Students with disabilities at these levels also encounter unfriendly social environments on the part of students without disabilities and instructors. To explicate, students with disabilities are sometimes referred to by certain derogatory names and inflated with all forms of stigma related abuses by students without disabilities. On their part, many instructors lack the requisite skills to handle students with disabilities in the classroom and in other academic related activities. Inaccessible structures like Classrooms/Lecture Theaters and Halls of Residence and other problems frequently create high tensions, with students with disabilities on one side and students without disabilities and instructors on the other side. These problems dampen the interests and hopes of persons with disabilities of attaining the highest level of education. It is vital that families of children with disabilities recognize their right to education and ensure the full development of their potential, sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for their fundamental rights and freedoms. These will enable PWDs to participate actively and effectively within a free society.

Also, in order to realize the rights of persons with disabilities to education without discrimination and on an equal basis, the government must ensure an inclusive education system at all levels. Persons with disabilities must not be excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability. It is education that will, from its lowest to highest levels, develop the personality, talent and creativity, as well as physical and mental ability, to the fullest for all persons with disabilities.

Above all, strenuous effort must be made to ensure the strict enforcement of the Persons with Disability Act 2006 and the ratification of the UN Convention on Persons with Disability so as to ensure equal opportunities for Persons With Disabilities in all aspects of human life.

*Isaac Afari Yeboah*  
*Student*  
*University of Cape Coast (UCC)*

# STATUS OF DISABLED PERSONS LIVES IN FOOD CRISIS WORRYING!

Thomas Ong'olo

**A**cross the region, the spring revolution has been witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Similar citizen uprisings have been seen in street matches and protests calling for a reduction of high prices of food and cost of living in a number of African countries. We have seen persons with disability joining demonstrations as citizens who bear the greatest impact and who constitute for 20% of the population living in poverty.

While different reports have documented how the standard of living has deteriorated in the last year among populations, due to escalating food and fuel prices, it has been postulated that persons with disabilities are significantly affected.

According to a new report, more than 90 percent of sub-Saharan Africa has been affected by the rising commodity costs. In order to meet their basic needs, citizens have reduced spending on leisure activities and purchases of luxury items. The economic downturn in the region has also made it difficult for many disabled persons to save money for the future and it has also reduced agriculture and business opportunities for many entrepreneurs due to declining purchasing power.

Meetings with disability activists in different conferences around the continent have echoed this concern. Recently in Accra, Ghana, a group of leaders, activists and managers in the blindness movement issued a statement calling on governments to initiate safety nets that cushion disabled persons. "There is an urgent need for the African governments to address the rising cost of food prices in order to improve the living standards



of persons with disabilities".

The latest update from the African Platform on Social Protection notes that millions of persons with disability are sleeping hungry and more are in the margins of starvation while others have lack of food related conditions. Not only has this crisis been reported in the refugees camps in the horn of Africa, but among asylum seekers in the Southern Africa region. The food crisis is a great concern and this is being worsened by a lack of disability inclusive policy among humanitarian aid agencies. Persons with disabilities in many of these points must also push and scramble for food rations in long and intimidating cues, and this comes with a price.

This is a call on the African disability rights movement to actively contribute to the civil society discourse as partners promoting proactive strategies and inclusion of persons with disability.

## **The Global Disability Rights Library: An Off-line Tool Reaching Beyond the Web**

This June marked the launch of the Global Disability Rights Library (GDRL) prototype, a digital library that moves web documents onto the subscriber's LAN (Local Area Network) that can be accessed on-line and off-line. The GDRL will provide users with the most up-to-date and significant information on disability rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This tool will prove to be invaluable for organisations in developing countries with limited access to the internet. Users will also

have the opportunity to share feedback with GDRL staff during the prototype period.

“We are excited to be able to begin sharing the prototype version of the Global Disability Rights Library with the public because we need everyone’s help in making it an outstanding resource,” says Andrea Shettle, GDRL program manager. “Disability rights advocates, policy makers, and other stakeholders in developing countries deserve easier access to a rich body of digital knowledge. These websites, videos, and electronic publications can support their work in improving the lives of people with disabilities in developing countries. The GDRL is still very much a work in progress. We need disabled people’s organizations, service providers, government personnel, families, and people with disabilities around

the world to start using it and telling us how they want us to improve the library.”

GDRL is a collaborative project managed by the U.S. International Council on Disabilities (USICD) and the University of Iowa’s WiderNet Project with funding support from USAID. Under the current project period, 60 organisations, universities, advocates, and other groups with restricted access to the internet in developing countries will receive a free off-line version of the digital library in an eGranary. An eGranary is an off-line platform that can hold and process a considerable collection of digital resources. The eGranary also has an interface and functionality that is similar to the web, which increases the ease-of-use for users who may be familiar with the web.

*People who do have internet access can now visit the on-line version of the prototype GDRL at <http://gdrl.org>.*

*To read more about the GDRL project please visit: <http://www.usicd.org/index.cfm/global-disability-rights-library>*

## Mainstreaming Disability in Development Cooperation Conference Held in Oslo

In cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, SADPD attended “Mainstreaming Disability in Development Cooperation,” a seminar hosted by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). The seminar took place in Oslo, Norway on 27-29th March 2011. The seminar gathered more than 60 representatives from UN agencies, multilateral organizations, Disabled People’s Organizations (DPOs), development agencies and regional bodies. Both Northern and Southern representatives were present. The aim of the seminar was to identify obstacles that encourage the exclusion of people with disabilities in development cooperation and identify possible solutions. The main obstacles found were the lack of awareness and needs of people with disabilities, lack of sufficient statistics and indicators, absence of political interest and attention and finally, lack of guidelines on how to mainstream. The main

solution identified was to establish a focal point in development aid agencies or in ministries responsible for disability. Furthermore, the organisations of persons with disabilities must be strengthened and regarded as partners in development. While in Oslo, SADPD held high-level meetings with:

- a. Ms Akiko Ito, Chief of UN DESA Secretariat
- b. Ms Judy Heumann, US State Department
- c. Ms Catherine Ruff, GTZ
- d. Ms Maria Veronica Reina, GPDD Executive Director
- e. UN Commission for Human Rights

For more information about the seminar please visit: <http://www.norad.no/en/About+Norad/Seminars/Disability+Mainstreaming>



## DO NOT PAMPER YOUR DISABLED CHILD

Most parents or guardians think they are doing their children with disabilities a favor by not allowing them to go to school, or do any house chores, or play, or learn with their able-bodied counterparts.

The fear of such parents is that their children with disabilities will be subject to all forms of bullying and mishandling by their colleagues and teachers. It should, however, be made clear to such parents that they are doing more harm than good. Their child with a disability will grow up uneducated, never learning to live independently, and potentially growing up to be a nuisance and a burden to other family members who will not give them the treatment they are accustomed to.

It is most beneficial to the entire family when parents show their parental love and educate all of their children, including those with a disability.

In my community, there was a visually impaired child whose father was wealthy and provided his child with whatever he needed and wanted. Unfortunately, his parents failed to send him to school with the rationale that he would be mistreated by his teachers. The father even visited the Wa School for the Blind and was instructed that fine care and education would be provided to his child. Unfortunately, his father passed away unexpectedly in a motor vehicle accident, and the child did not know how to take



care of himself. Eventually he unfortunately became homeless and was forced to beg on the street to make a living.

I am urging all parents to send their children to school. This will make them economically independent and allow them to fend for themselves when their parents have passed away.

*By Abubakari Ayishetu  
Student with visual impairment  
University of Cape Coast (UCC)*



## PERSONS WITH DISABILITY IN SOUTH SUDAN MUST NOT WATCH FROM THE MARGINS

BY Thomas Ong'olo

Saturday, 9th July 2011 became a defining moment for the people of South Sudan, who achieved legitimacy as Africa's youngest independent state after a bloody post-colonial struggle for self-determination. As the Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities, we in this issue of the "African Disability News" offer congratulations and cheers to the new democracy, its people with disability, and leadership.

It was a historic moment, not only for the people and new government of South Sudan but to Africa and all humanity. The mood was clearly ecstatic, live broadcasts streamed across the world and were witnessed by millions of people and international guests. As the new flag was raised and the old one lowered, each action signified declaration of the Independence of South Sudan.

The excitement demonstrated new hope and a new dawn of exuberance and expectations for

the people of the new state. In his speech, The South Sudan President, Salva Kiir, saw this as a new beginning of nation building after years of neglect and a long journey of significant self-sacrifice.

As for thousands of disabled persons in South Sudan, the occasion was symbolic and a mark of freedom. This is an opportunity to see the birth of a country, which they had fought for and paid with their blood and lives. A landmine survivor wept in joy, and later a group of blind veterans exploded ammunition as a sign of welcoming the new republic.

For the new nation, the hard reality must be the enormous task of national reconstruction and nurturing a new social, economic, and political spectrum. This demands a strong homegrown determination and substantial support of regional, continental, and international development partners.

## What are the lessons for persons with disability in the young republic of South Sudan?

Firstly, the leadership of the existing disability movement must take stock of the organisations representing disabled people, promote unity, and establish a common voice. This will give it a face as an important stakeholder within the emerging reorganisation of the country. They must reach out and join as affiliates and members, regional and international disabled peoples organizations. One important ally whom they must court and include as members of the new federation are disabled war veterans, as they come commanding respect and with strong bargaining power.

The leadership must also acknowledge and realise that the task of building a new nation rests mainly on the shoulders of its people who must be offered progressive leadership. They have a responsibility to assure people that life after independence would not only be better, but also fair and just with equal opportunity and prosperity for its millions of persons with disabilities.

Secondly, they must immediately establish linkages and engage people to satisfy their potential high expectations and communicate the realistic expectations that they should demand. Sensitising and rallying disabled people to understand their constitution and their rights in the new nation is critical in the task of building a young democracy.

Partnership with the media will also play a leading role in sensitising and educating persons with disabilities and the population on disability about available services, opportunities and challenges facing disabled persons.

Thirdly, the advocacy of ratification of UNCRPD by South Sudan must be taken up. It is also essential to promote inclusive development to reaffirm the full participation

and inclusion of persons with disabilities in nation building. The earlier this is acknowledged and embraced, the better for the new democracy of South Sudan, its people, leadership and government.

Fourth, South Sudan is endowed with substantial natural resources including oil and other minerals that if exploited and utilised appropriately, should offer the new nation significant fodder for accelerated development programmes.

With a high number of disabled persons and survivors of war, one development programme is social protection, which the disability leadership must join the discussion, planning, and establishment for all. They must also be aware of the entitlement advocacy from war veterans, those who played a leading role in the struggle, seeking exclusive special disability schemes and programmes. Planning for the reconstruction of the new country after war must adopt disability inclusion as policy, so that when education, health systems, roads, airports, sports facilities and its agricultural sector are being developed, mainstreaming becomes a norm and this critical sector of the population are not left in the margins in the improvement of standards of living.

### RECENT NEWS ON UNCRPD

(as of August 1, 2011)

#### Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- 149 signatories
- 103 ratifications

#### Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

- 90 signatories
- 62 ratifications
- Pakistan ratified the Convention on 5 July 2011





## ROUNDTABLE TO DEVELOP THE NEW CONTINENTAL DISABILITY STRATEGY FOR THE AFRICAN DECADE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES 2010-2019

**T**he Secretariat of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (SADPD), together with collaborative partners, will host a disability Roundtable on the development of the new AU Continental Disability Strategy (CDS) for the newly declared African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2010-2019). The Roundtable will provide an opportunity to provide inputs into the process of formulating a new AU CDS, which will be submitted to the relevant ministerial sessions and adopted by the African Heads of States Summit.

SADPD has taken the leadership to ensure that concerns of persons with disability are included in the new plan by working with DPOs, disability policy experts, African Union, African Rehabilitation Institute, human rights defenders, NGOs, Universities and the African Commission Working Group on Older Persons and Persons with Disabilities.

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The Roundtable will provide an opportunity for:

- a. Comprehensive and participatory brainstorming sessions to articulate the rights and development of people with disabilities;
- b. Identification of good practices that can be replicated in AU member states; and
- c. Drafting of the Continental Plan of Action for consideration by the African Union.

Invited guests to the event include:

- a. Ministry of Women Children and Persons with Disabilities, Government of the Republic of South African
- b. Shuaib Chalklen – UN Special Rapporteur on Disability
- c. Mrs. Reine Alapini Gansou – Chairperson on the African Commission
- d. Commissioner Yeung Sik Yuen - African Commission
- e. Commissioner Bience Gawanas - AU Labour and Social Affairs Commission

# Social and Sexual Awareness, the Perspective of Persons with Disabilities

By: Seth K Addi

Sexual awareness is normal. Sexual feelings are normal, and there are many ways of expressing one's sexuality. If a person has a disability, it does not change any of this. What often changes is the socialization that provides the foundation for sexual identity.

In Ghana, persons with disabilities are sometimes oppressed and treated as less than someone without an identifiable disability. This can have a profound impact on the individual's self-identity. Often, people with developmental disabilities feel they are bad or that something is wrong with them. By extension, they can feel that their normal sexual feelings are also bad or wrong. A human's sexual drive is a primary drive; it is not optional. We have a sexual drive as long as we have enough to eat, drink, and sleep; and we are not under undue stress.

Many of my disabled friends have told me in confidence that having sex with someone is the only time they feel normal. They have a job that they know a "normal" person would not have. They cannot drive. They are not free to go where they want, or when they want. They always have to tell someone where they are and who they are with. They feel like they are treated like a child.

In regards to children with disabilities, in the early years, we give them information on being a boy or a girl. It is also helpful to give them correct names for their body parts including penis, vagina and anus. These terms should be taught using relaxed and open language.

Whatever words you choose, they will best serve a child by imparting the notion that sexual feelings are wonderful and very personal. Bath time is also a good time to teach body awareness including the need

to treat one's body with respect. Based on my experience, I believe this can be taught, regardless of the identified level of disability.

// Bath time is also a good time to teach body awareness including the need to treat one's body with respect. //

If we allow the child's disability to keep him from learning these concepts, then we will leave him/her vulnerable. Just as children learn to eat, drink, sleep, and deal with fear, they can learn to express their sexuality. In fact, children need appropriate support to express themselves sexually; and this support includes information about appropriate boundaries and various ways to show regard for one's self.

By the time teenagers and adults with disabilities move into their teens, they will experience changes in their bodies that are reflected in their sexuality. They will begin to experience orgasms. They will grow pubic and underarm hair. Overall their body hair will change. A young man's voice will change. A young woman will begin to menstruate. Imagine going through these changes without knowing the names of body parts, without the preparation of anticipating change, and without the awareness that someone trusted is available if he/she has any questions. This type of information helps these individuals know that they are not "falling apart" and that they can ask questions. It is not enough to just wait and then tell someone "oh, by the way, ask if you have questions."

After a young woman begins menstruation, she is almost old enough for regular vaginal exams. Many will be terrified of these exams. Women with disabilities often need training on how to breathe during an exam, how to relax during the exam, and how to be assertive with the physician in order to go through exams without being medicated. Women who do not speak can be taught to use gestures to tell the doctor to “stop” or “wait.”

Also, women are abused sexually at an alarming rate, however, women who have a disability appear to be abused even more. While accurate statistics are difficult to obtain, it is certain that all women and men with disabilities need to be aware of their healthy sexual options; and they need to know what to do if faced with sexual abuse or sexual contact that makes them uncomfortable.

Unfortunately, some people are victimized sexually because they value the feeling of sexual activity. If we can recognize the power of an abusive relationship because of one’s sexual feelings, we will be better able to support people in developing ways to discriminate respectful relationships that can grow and benefit both people.

Adult men and women who have disabilities may or may not be aware of their own

attractiveness and how they present themselves to others. Women who have a disability may want to shave their legs in the summer. Men may want to experiment with hairstyles. Both may want to decide what looks best on them. This may seem trivial, but it is important; it allows them to deal with the world.

Some individuals with disabilities may need specific instructions about social expectations. Some manners, ways of conversing, or sexual mores may not have meaning for them in the same way a person without autism might experience them. For these individuals, it is important to provide them with ample information about social rituals and boundaries. Role playing, discreet reminders when in public, and lots of practice are helpful.

People are sexual beings. It is not a choice or an option. It is a truth. The best sex education is a full awareness of social skills, boundaries, sexual expression, and expectations.

*The author is the president of the Network of Journalists for the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa (PROMOAFRICA),  
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## THE SECRETARIAT OF AFRICAN DECADE WELCOMES WORLD DISABILITY REPORT

**T**he World Health Organisation (WHO), together with the World Bank launched its first ever World Report on Disability (WRD) on the 9th of June 2011. The report has some important assertions that are worth noting:

- The report presents evidence that previous figures underestimated global prevalence of disability.
- The UN states that currently one billion people have some form of disability making it approximately 15% of the population.
- The report regularly quotes persons with disabilities.
- It emphasises the need for their voices to be heard.
- The priority of the report will be to focus its attention on persons with disabilities worldwide.
- It concentrates on the situation of persons with disabilities living in the poorest communities.
- The WRD comes at a critical time with 149 countries having signed and 101 ratified the UNCRPD with 26 ratifications from Africa.

The Secretariat of African Decade for Persons with Disabilities calls on all African governments to take note of the WRD as they plan for the implementation of UNCRPD. The WRD provides strong evidence of the need to make rapid progress to equalise rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities.

For the report:  
[http://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/index.html)

## NEW MEMBERS OF STAFF

SADPD welcomes the following members of staff who have joined the Secretariat during the past year.



**BHEKI JELE**

Executive Support Officer – Fundraising and Knowledge Management, joined the organization in September 2010



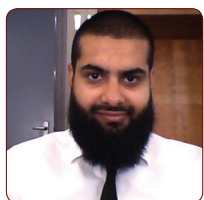
**JACQUELINE BURGESS**

Communications, Fundraising, and Marketing Officer, joined the Secretariat in January 2011 through support from Voluntary Service Organisation.



**INNOCENTIA MGIJIMA**

Intern – Legal Policy and Research



**MOHAMMED SALIS**

Intern – Policy and Communication

## Persons with Short Stature, A Spotlight on this Visible Minority

By Aida Sarr

*For the first time the West African Region elected its 1st Miss Short Stature. This overturned the classical concept of beauty. Over time our concept of beauty seems to fluctuate, no matter whether you are a heavy or a skinny woman. The truth is that, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.*

Persons of short stature derived their disability from a particular medical condition. Many persons of short stature continuously encounter discrimination which leads them to need

extra support from family, social networks and advocacy groups, which enable them to address their challenges in educational, work and social settings.

Findings from The Network of Journalists for the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Africa-Ghana Chapter (PromoAfrica) showed that in Ghana, men and women of short stature face challenges in their daily lives. According to PromoAfrica, many of these men and women have fewer opportunities in education, have fewer children, a lower salary than their colleagues, and generally lack

self-esteem, employment opportunities, social lives, and romantic relationships. Women in particular report that they are not taken as seriously as their taller peers.

According to findings from PromoAfrica, ninety-eight percent (98%) of persons of short stature, whom they interviewed in a recent study, have never attended school or have dropped out of school at an early age, and could not effectively express themselves or write English. Another problem faced in this community is that there are few people who are visible in the entertainment industry. Also, in Ghana, there are inadequate records and statistical data on persons of short stature. These examples prove that there are socioeconomic implications of being a person of short stature.

Paradoxically, in Ancient Egypt, persons with short stature were respected and did not see themselves as having a physical disability, according to a study by US researchers. This team, from the prestigious Georgetown University, looked at biological remains and artistic evidence of people living with short stature in Egypt and discovered that Ancient Egyptians worshipped gods of persons with short stature, and that many of these people held positions of authority in their households. Wisdom writings and moral teachings in ancient Egypt commanded respect for persons of short stature and other individuals with disabilities.

According to research published in the American Journal of Medical Genetics, persons of short stature were socially accepted in ancient Egypt, their recorded daily activities suggest assimilation into daily life, and their disability was never shown as a physical handicap. What has brought discrimination to this community over these past centuries? How has the African continent been considered the oldest civilisation and cradle of humankind, while inheriting a stage of social exclusion of a visible minority?

One of the main problems is that there is no legal framework to take into consideration these issues and there is a lack of information about sensitizing the overall society about

persons with short stature. Because of this, discrimination against this community will never be tackled in the Continent. The role that media can play to raise awareness is without any doubt inescapable. Media, today, reaches people at home and at work... when we're thinking... when we're laughing... and when we are making choices that have an enormous impact.

"The unique potential and duty of the media is to help its audiences connect to the issues that define our time as said," *Rupert Murdoch*. If we as a society are able to encourage the media to be more inclusive of persons of short stature in their media content, this community will be viewed as more socially acceptable and have an easier time fitting into society.

Finally, the first edition of *Miss Short Stature* was not meant to celebrate beauty, but to show that all human beings are born free and equal.

## Why are Persons with Disabilities Consistently Excluded in the Fight Against Poverty?

**By: Seth K Addi**

*I have been a journalist for the past eleven years. And yet not until 2007 did I ever think about disability and development all that much. Many people who are not a part of the disability movement commonly ask how disability is related to the development sector. This is my attempt to address these questions and concerns that the disability development community commonly faces.*

We know that most of the people who are poor are excluded, marginalized, and disempowered. So we can guess that the disabled – defined in this way – are more likely to be poor. But I did not know that



most people who are poor are persons with disabilities. A book I cited not long ago quotes statistics from the World Bank to suggest that one in five people who are poor are affected by disabilities.

This statistic is staggering. It is even more staggering that the international development community has, for the most part, ignored this issue. This is shocking because several of the papers in the volume note that when it is assessed, disability is a greater excluder of participation in all sectors in life, surpassing gender and ethnicity. Despite being one of the more visible manifestations of exclusion, stigma and lack of power, disability is hidden from sight, most of the time, in development research discourses. And yet its study offers the potential of so much learning for everyone working in development.

Worldwide, poverty is the single most pressing issue for millions of people with disabilities. While the United Nations estimates that 10 per cent of the world's population lives with a disability, the World Bank estimates that one in five of the world's poorest people are disabled or live in a household with a disabled member. Not only are persons with disabilities therefore twice as likely to live in poverty, but they will often also be among the poorest of the poor. Go into any impoverished urban slum area or walk into any poor rural village and ask the people who live there 'who is the poorest person in your community' – you will more than likely be directed to the door of a disabled person.

Poverty is not simply the lack of income; it is a denial of the fundamental freedom and opportunity to develop as a human being. The elimination of poverty lies, in large measure, in the creation of a just society in which all citizens have equal opportunity to develop their full potential. Microfinance is considered an important tool in reaching the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. Nevertheless, few people with disabilities have access to microfinance.

Despite these clear links, as a nation, we are only beginning to understand how poverty and disability interact. It is an area that continues to

be inadequately understood and significantly under-researched. Without an accurate understanding of the links between poverty and disability, our capacity to know when, where, and how to intervene to break these links will be significantly limited. This is all the more problematic because research increasingly shows that poverty and disability are not inevitably linked. Most often, it is not people's disabilities that block their ability to support themselves and their families adequately. Rather, it is the stigma, discrimination and lack of knowledge or awareness about disability in the surrounding environment that limits their abilities and talents.

The social inclusion model being advocated for by international organisation like the Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and SightSavers International, as I understood it means "ensuring that everyone is included in society rather than excluded." The social inclusion for persons with disabilities is based on the social model of disability and involves breaking down the barriers in society that prevent their full participation in society. This includes, for instance, promoting positive attitudes and perceptions (e.g. disabled people in politics), modifying the architectural environment (e.g. ramps in public buildings), providing information in accessible formats (e.g. websites in large print) and making sure that laws and policies support the exercise of full participation and non-discrimination (e.g. employment discrimination laws).

Access to education and employment, an accessible physical environment, and changes in legal, social and cultural norms to ensure social inclusion mean that persons with disabilities can be full, participating members in the surrounding community. The risk factors for living with a disability in much of the world today are virtually identical to those risk factors for living in poverty: social marginalization, lack of access to education and employment, limited political clout and the restricted right to self-determination.

As things are beginning to change, the growing attention to disability has been fostered by the

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Coming into force in May 2008, the UNCRPD approaches disability, access and poverty from a rights perspective, broadly confirming that people with disabilities have the same claim to full participation in society as every other citizen. Certainly the UNCRPD has also brought a number of international development organisations and experts to the table, with global disability advocates making a clear and coherent case for why inclusion of disability is a human right. In Ghana, the Ghana Federation of the Disabled (GFD), Mind Freedom Ghana and the Network of Journalists for the Promotion of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa-Ghana Chapter (PROMOAFRICA) have teamed up to seek to the ratification of the UN Convention and the passage of the Ghana Mental Health Bill.

Unless persons with disabilities are included in general international development programmes and policies, none of the Millennium Development Goals will be met, and no society will be able to significantly reduce poverty.

From the outset, it will be prudent that the international development efforts undertake

full inclusion of and consultation with disabled people's organisations (DPOs) – groups that are run for and by persons with disabilities. The slogan Nothing About Us Without Us is nowhere more important than in international development circles, where organizations that often work at national, regional and global levels need to ensure that groups representing disabled persons are part of the dialogue at all stages.

The purpose of this article is to promote change: to help move policy and practice towards real inclusion and participation of disabled people. Not everyone will agree with what they read in this article, but I hope it provokes critical reflection and renewed urgency in each reader's contribution to including persons with disabilities in development.

Many of the barriers that persons with disabilities face are related to structures, institutions and policies at national and international levels, so it is important that we advocate for changes that will promote equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

# The **Voices** of People with Disabilities Must be Heard **Loud** and **Clear**

**By: AK Dube, CEO SADPD**

**Printed: The Guardian Poverty Matters Blog  
21 July 2011**

**T**he challenges facing people with disabilities must be at the centre of all international development discussions if we are to change attitudes towards disability in

Africa.

As a disabled person living in Africa, I have experienced the challenges and discrimination that many others in similar situations to me

experience across the continent. Last week I spoke to parliamentarians, NGOs and donor agencies about the importance of ensuring people with disabilities are central to any discussions on international development that happen between now and 2015, the expiry date for the current millennium development goals (MDGs), and to ensure people living with disabilities are not left out again.

Although attitudes towards disabled people across Africa are starting to change, people with disabilities still face many challenges, from the additional costs for the healthcare services they need, where these even exist, to the stigma and discrimination they can face. It is frequently assumed that because someone is disabled they will be a financial and social burden to their family, rather than a child to be proud of and who, with some support, can be an incredibly productive member of the community. I feel my own story has resonance here. The use of my right hand and left leg were impaired when I contracted polio and measles when I was two years old. Afterwards I lived with my father who was a soldier. He was strict and made sure I could look after myself – he did not treat me like a child with disabilities. As it was just the two of us, I ran the house, collecting firewood, cooking and washing – skills that made me independent. The people in our local village did not approve of this and thought I should be sent to an institution for the disabled, but my father steadfastly refused and in many ways was ahead of his time.

In South Africa, where my organisation is based, progress has been made in understanding the challenges faced by people with disabilities, which has led to the introduction of monthly grants for people with mental and physical disabilities. Unfortunately, in some disadvantaged areas of the country, old perceptions are still present. During some recent travels to the Mpumalanga province in South Africa for research into the welfare of people with disabilities, I interviewed parents with disabled children, and found that some were still hiding their children away from their communities. Worse still, some would only bring out their disabled child when it was time

to pick up the monthly grant.

These attitudes can be broken down, but we need an approach that starts from the top so that at every level we can reinforce the fact that, with some assistance, people with disabilities can be active contributors to the community. For this reason I am extremely keen to ensure that disabled people are not left out of any post-2015 development framework.

I think it's extremely important that whatever follows, the MDGs move beyond a list of non-binding, broad objectives, and that any targets agreed are better linked to binding international bi- tri- and multilateral agreements. In my view, the post-2015 agenda needs to contain all of the existing MDGs, and place increased emphasis on:

- a. The ratification, domestication and monitoring of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in all countries.
- b. Greater inclusion of disability in the government's national development plans, the MDGs and the wider implementation of the CRPD.
- c. Empowering persons with disabilities and strengthening their capacity and involvement in development work, democracy and human rights work.
- d. The development, support and financial **investment** of small-scale enterprises, agriculture and related agribusinesses, ensuring the producers retain as much of the value chain of products as possible/feasible.
- e. Increased government accountability alongside efforts to root out corruption.

I hope that the discussions will ensure that, in the future, disabled people will be fully included in international development plans. I will be working closely with partners such as the charity Sightsavers International to ensure that the voices of people with disabilities are heard loud and clear.





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