

THE IMPACT OF LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORK ON YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN BOTSWANA

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SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

- Despite growing momentum for the social and human rights of persons with disabilities – as expressed in the World Action Programme (1982), the UN Standard Rules (1993), the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF, 2001), the EU Guidance Note on Disability and Development for EU Delegations and Services (2003), and the present drafting of the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons (2006) – African governments and policy makers have rarely considered the needs of disabled people when formulating their HIV & AIDS and legislation policy agendas especially in Botswana. Absent from consultation processes, we (people with disabilities) especially the youth have not been heard or included, even when strategies may involve services traditionally serving people with disabilities.

BARRIERS

- Policies not disability friendly; which do not allow full participation and inclusion of disabled through promotion of social, economic and political programmes.
- Lack of advocacy and lobbying skills/strategies to lobby and advocate for disability friendly policies, legislation and inclusive programmes
- Lack of general information and HIV/AIDS information in Braille and large print for the visually and partially sighted.
- Lack of universal HIV/AIDS vocabulary for sign and tactile language interpreters for the hearing and hard of hearing impaired.
- Inaccessible infrastructure (hospitals, courts, CEDA offices, youth districts offices, parliaments offices, and clinics) for wheel chair users; to access services.
- Lack of research

- Lack of allocation of resources for effective response to the needs of people with disabilities .
- Society's Discrimination and Stigmatization against people with disabilities.
- Lack of statistics to determine number of disabled people who are HIV positive in the country..
- Lack of youth with disabilities representation and gender in decision making .
- Myths about the sexuality of PWDs

- Reluctance of parents and personnel to support the youth and children
- No proper prevalence figures for people with disabilities in our country
- we are usually left out as most messages are developed without us in mind
- Vulnerability to sexual abuse
- Attitudes of Society towards people with disabilities
- Lack of access to counselling, confidentiality and consistent in the fight against HIV/AIDS and economic empowerment

- Many major donors, government, aid agencies and specialised NGOs do not consider the particular needs of disabled people in their programmes or projects. Many organisations mentioned above continue to underestimate the rights of people with disabilities for equal access to information, services and programmes care and support. There is furthermore a lack of coordination to ensure effective and efficient implementation of policy/services that are equally accessible / friendly to people with disabilities.

- Youth with disabilities are not recognized as users of various by providers of essential services and for those who believe they have included us only mentioned us and go ahead to develop programmes that do not include us, others have recognized us as a vulnerable group but don't know how to respond to the challenges facing young people with disabilities in their diversity.
- Superstition in Africa remains another challenge as most people believe that there is no need for people with disabilities to be included in the HIV/AIDS programmes since they are not sexually active and therefore will not be affected by HIV/AIDS virus.

What needs to be done to make access a reality for youth with disabilities

- Break the silence
- Educate,inform, end ignorance and fear among the youth about their rights
- Prevent prejudice, discrimination and stigma
- Create a focal point for Disability discussions
- Lobby for disability legislation that is sensitive and responds to disability issues
- Give top priority to protect those who are vulnerable to HIV and those living with the virus
- Advocate/Push for effective education systems that recognise the special needs of disabled people and responds to the environment they live in.
- Fight poverty and deprivation
- Development of disability friendly IEC materials for use of persons with disabilities.
- Sensitization of health service providers, social workers and the general public on the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Strengthening the capacity of parents, and community members to support the needs of their children with disabilities
- Parents of children with disabilities need to be empowered, supported and educated on how to raise a confident child with disability, coping and supporting their child.

- Today there is an urgent need for action, for collaboration and support of innovative efforts for the inclusion of youth with disabilities in all departments, programmes, ministries and outreach support and service delivery efforts, particularly those related to HIV and AIDS and empowerment. There is also a need for us(youth with disabilities) acknowledge that our laws and policy, HIV & AIDS concerns us too, therefore we need to act to prevent the effects, and mobilise the support we need in our environments to maintain the quality of our lives.
- In order to achieve national awareness and collaborative action, Mainstreaming and prioritising disability into service organisations, programmes, policies and laws through Advocacy lobbying strategies to Influence programmes is essential.

lastly Let us acknowledge our differences and work with us, as people with capacities rather than looking at our deficiencies. Life must be examined to be lived fully, it may be painful, but the start can be the beginning of building new personal and collective futures relationships. You owe us(people with disabilities) a debt of gratitude as we present you with this magnitude of change, hence including us in your programmes and policies can and will not be simply for our own benefit, but for the benefit of our country as well.

Allow me to make an appeal to BNYC to assist youth and children with disabilities to lobby government effectively and consider direct involvement of the youth with disabilities when making disability laws and policy, youth policy and how to implement them so that other voice and views will be included in the policy and laws .

Thank you