

Changing the negative cultural perceptions towards Persons with Disabilities

Primary readers: Local government authorities and community members.

Message: Facilitate total inclusion of Persons with Disability.

Summary:

We should have awareness raising campaign through radio discussions and meetings with community members in order to create an enabling environment for the disabled to participate in politics, inter-marriages, education, access to medical services and employment. "Disability is not inability" which means that if given the chance and be provided with the necessary assistance, they too can be useful to society as well as family. In order to create or facilitate total inclusion for PWDS there should;

- a) Training of more CBR workers who will be charged with the responsibility of disseminating the message through general meetings, regular home visits to families with PWDS and giving them referral forms to rehabilitation centres for the appropriate treatment required.
- b) Councillors, Ward members and District Council chairpersons should seek funds through donors for sustainability. Though i may not highlight all the issues to facilitate a level plain field for PWDS, I would like my Article to be used as a tool to effect change in the lives of the disabled.

Introduction

In Sierra Leone, the Disability Act has been passed in Parliament and therefore needs to be implemented for a better change. I believe that this document will address issues like discrimination in employment, ownership of family properties and government rendered services. Regular meetings, home visits by CBR workers will surely help improve the perceptions about PWDS. Since the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs have been developed to Local Council, the need for councillors to seek financial support to train more CBR workers is necessary. Sometimes, CBR workers are faced with financial problems i.e., paying their fare to visit families with PWDS and sometimes they look forward to CBR workers to pay their fares to rehabilitation centres they are referred to.

In creating a level plain field for the disabled to participate in politics, they should be encouraged to be nominated and be voted for into prominent offices or Parliament as there is no significant representation of disabled persons in Parliament, neither are they empowered in most agencies and departments.

Even in the history of Sierra Leone, five physically challenged persons have been recruited into the Sierra Leone Police Force and one as a Member of Parliament. Though this is a sign of progress, more needs to be done in the other agencies and departments due to the activities of the CBR, workers' perceptions are beginning to change. Before the advent of CBR programmes, beliefs about the disabled is highly linked with witchcraft. Parents who have children with disabilities usually turn to native doctors or sorcerers for solution, which are most times misleading. There is always the belief that PWDS are bad omen in a family.

With regular meetings by CBR workers to families with PWDS and community members, perceptions are now beginning to change. Formally, people thought that there was no way a blind or physically challenged could be cured or made useful; but with some success stories around other communities, people are beginning to work side by side the CBR workers.

Here is a case study of Abioseh Bangura who resides at Kossuh Town, Hastings. He had never walked since birth. His story was related to witchcraft. It was said that a witch Doctor or Sorcerer revealed to them that he was bewitched by his step mother because he is the only boy in the family. In the African setting, it is strongly believed that the boy or male children have the right or claim to family property. Therefore, when the Sorcerer told them that Abioseh was bewitched, there was no way they could think of rehabilitating him. After regular meetings and sensitisation programmes the family agreed to take him to a rehabilitation centre. With proper diagnosis, Abioseh was provided with a wheelchair and at the start of the 2013 school academic year, he will be enrolled into primary school.

Conclusion

Community members should be the primary readers because without changing their perceptions about PWDS, they will not be ready to talk to CBR workers for referral to rehabilitation centres. These messages should be passed to day meetings, sensitisation and awareness raising campaigns. The only way how families with PWDS will co-operate is through success stories of other families. The reason why the lives of the disabled need to be changed for the better is because as human beings, they too have the basic Human Rights as abled-bodied persons. As the background setting of my community is highly influenced by supernatural beliefs, there is need for my primary readers to take appropriate steps to facilitate total inclusion of PWDS.

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