

Building Consensus between Organisations of Persons with Disabilities and Service Providers in the Disability Sector

The primary reader: The Ministry Of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs.

MESSAGE: The participation of PWDS in programme design and implementation enhances collaboration between Organisations of Persons with Disability (OPWDS) and service providers in the Disability Sector.

Introduction

There are many Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPWDS) of varying categories in the Bo City. Most of these were established immediately after the ten-year civil war largely as a means to access relief aid. But while some disintegrated as relief supply stopped, many more emerged mainly as sprinter groups from existing OPWDS. In view of the weak capacity of these organisations, they depend almost entirely on support from disability-focused service providers many of which also appeared during the war provide a wide range of services for PWDS including prosthetic and orthopaedic (PEOPLE and O) services, educational support, income generation activities, capacity building and humanitarian work.

While these interventions are considered as life-saving especially by these agencies, their relationship with the PWDS and their organisations is mostly uneasy. OPWDS have increasingly become aware of their right to participate fully at every stage in the development process including programme design and implementation something which they claim is mostly disregarded by these partners. This is however contested by the service providers and like-minds who point to the disunity and weak capacity of PWDS as the key factor for their inclusion in decision-making processes which often require a certain level of professionalism.

This argument may be true as the bulk of the population of PWDS in Sierra Leone is illiterate, ignorant and unskilled which also accounts for the weak capacity of OPWDS. However, it is important to point out that many service providers including NGOS invest very limited resources in meaningful organisational development programmes for OPWDS and often mainly focus on the provision of Micro Credit support, traditional small scale income generating activities such as soap making, weaving, backyard gardening tin smiting etc. This is mainly the yardstick used to justify the exclusion of PWDS from the mainstream service delivery processes. The recruitment process of many service providers, is largely unsupportive of PWDS, and could therefore be hardly seen serving in any capacity within such organisations.

At this point, it is also important to highlight the culture of dependency of PWDS on charity in some cases inherited from their segregated learning environment where almost everything was (and still is) provided for them.

According to Part 5 (Rights and Privileges) Section 20 of the Persons with Disability Act 2011, "no employer shall discriminate against a Person with Disability in relation to: (a) the advertisement of employment; but the recruitment for employment unless the Disability makes it impossible for the person to perform the particular type of employment". However, partners of OPWDS in many cases use largely inaccessible means of advertisement for employment which by itself constitutes discrimination

as the lack of timely information denies PWDS the opportunity to compete. It is expected that a healthy relationship between OPWDS and partners (service providers) fosters information sharing through internal mechanisms established and recognised by both parties.

In the week of the establishment of the National Commission for PWDs, it is expected that service delivery structures and processes will become more inclusive, accessible and participatory to ensure that PWDS will fully enjoy their Rights and privileges as provided by Law. It is only then, that mutual trust and harmony will exist between PWDS and service providers.

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