

Negative community perceptions about people with Disabilities in Tambaka chiefdom, Bombali district

Primary readers: Ministry of social welfare, gender and children's affairs

Messages: Trough community awareness raising and advocacy, PWDs can be included in decision making progress

Introduction

Tambamka chiefdom is found in the Bombali District in the northern province of Sierra Leone. Tambaka is the largest chiefdom in the district but less developed in terms of health, education and road net work. It is a Susu dominated chiefdom which shares boundaries with the republic of Guinea.

It is the chiefdom that hosts the national wide life park known as the Otamba National Kilimi Park which attracts tourists to see the different kinds of animals like hippopotamus, chimpanzees and other wide animals in the wide life park. Getting in to the chiefdom of Tambaka is a ferry means of transport crossing from Kamakwie which deprives the chiefdom from development.

In Tambaka the rights of persons with disabilities (PWDs) are not recognized. In this community the perceptions towards PWDs is negative in fact stigmatization and discrimination of PWDs remain strong, including within the family, and perception of disability by communities.

Discrimination in access to health for PWDs is largely indirect. PWDs have limited opportunities to participate in decisions affecting their communities, thinking that PWDs is as result of witchcraft and pregnant women not taking the advices from elders. For example pregnant women should not wash at night in streams, rivers and open areas and they believe that their traditions allow husbands and family members to beat their pregnant woman whenever she does anything wrong. There fore disability of their children is as a result of disobedient of their mothers. They thought it fit not to include PWDs in decision making, participation since they think their ideas are not relevant and they are seen to be less efficient.

Since they are not socially considered sometimes they are locked in the rooms as parents go to farm. This is a case study of a twelve year old boy at Yannah; whose parents always locked him in the room and went to the farm for their normal activities

He would be in room for the rest of the day until his parents returned from the farm before he can get chance to come out of the room. In the room, he has a little container where he urinates. Other PWDs similarly suffer the same especially social isolation.

Strategies to address the challenges:

Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) in collaboration with DPOs and local councils should conduct community sensitization on Child Rights Act 2007 (CRA) and state the twelve important rights in the CRA and also to include section 60 of CRA which talk about care and protection.

Awareness raising will be done whereby parents from different areas will come. One parent will take a representation about the experiences she has had about having a child with disabilities, challenges

and how she has overcome them. They discuss income generating activities to support them and their children. Service provider like MSWGCA, local council and DPOs will also inform communities about the services available for PWDs.

In the awareness raising some relevant leaflets in the CRA and the disability act will be distributed to the people so that they will know PWDs has their basic human rights and it must be respected.

Parents should share experiences about their children and share about social problems abandonment of young mothers by husband and in laws after giving birth to a child with a disability. Each person in the family and community has a perception that, it is always the fault of the woman to give birth to a disabled child.

MSWGCA and DPOs should do counseling to parents who will be disclosing their problem. This will be done to strengthen family relationship and the family to accept a child with disability without blaming the mother or thinking that the child is as a result of witchcraft.

MSWGCA and DPOs should ensure that the legal framework for the protection and promotion of the rights of PWDs has been improved considerably. Sensitization is instrumental in changing the community perception towards PWDs

Conclusion

It is important that through community awareness raising and advocacy, PWDs can be included in decision making process to overcome the challenges they have. The community will be encouraged to stand up for the rights of their children. It is said in the CRA section 47page 23 that child welfare committees should be established within villages to protect and promote children's rights at all levels. This is inclusive of children with disabilities.

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