

## **The impact of the proliferation of PWDS on the Disability Movement in Sierra Leone**

**Primary Readers:** Persons with Disabilities, SLUDI and the Disability Commission.

**Message:** The need to minimise conflict among PWDS in Sierra Leone.

### **Introduction:**

Sierra Leone is made up of 14 districts and 4 cities with the population of about six million people. 15% of this population are PWDS with various types of disabilities such as, amputees, the polio victims, Hearing Impaired, Visually Impaired and Epilepsy. In 1991, war broke in the country which led to an increase in the number of people with disabilities. After the war in 2002, government, NGOs and donor agencies turned their attention to support disabled persons organisations (DPOs) with food relief, used clothing and domestic utensils. Due to the generous donations mentioned above, some PWDS who were under bad treatment from parents or guardians decided to abandon their homes and head for the streets; since food and shelter was no problem by then because of the displaced camps and the relief supply. Also because of the relief supply, the forming of DPOS came into competition even though there were already existing associations like the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind (SLAB), the Sierra Leone Amputee Persons Association (SLAPA) and other polio groups.

In Sierra Leone today, we can talk of more than 100 DPOS. The reasons for the proliferation of DPOS are:

1. The leaders that initiated the forming of DPOS after the war did not do it with pure motive for the general benefits of the disability groups. If at all they did, they deviated from their Vision and Mission.
2. They failed to disseminate information to their subordinates.
3. They marginalised the less educated because of their selfish desire.
4. They failed to relinquish power to the others.

The subordinates have no alternative but to form their own DPOS while others chose to join bad groups to show rude attitudes, violence, criminals and prostitution since they have no fixed bond in society.

A Case Study of the Sierra Leone Amputee Persons Association (SLAPA) This was the first DPO for Amputees in Sierra Leone because of the above reasons, today we have sprinter groups of amputees. For example; War wounded, War amputees, non-war amputees in different parts of the country. There is nothing to distinguish us from each other.

### **Gender Equality**

Many women with Disability prefer not to join DPOS because even among their own colleagues they felt marginalised. Rather than appointing them to positions in the Organisation, they are forced to form women's wings.

### **Educational level**

Majority of the disabled population in Sierra Leone are illiterate. Their aim for belonging to some of these organisations varies from the very few educated counterparts being in the majority. They can be easily swayed to support wrong decisions. Any deviation from their stand can lead to splinter groups being born.

### **The youth feel marginalised.**

Like in many other non-disabled organisations, the youth in some of these organisations feel marginalised and have often left the mother group to form their own DPOS. E.g., Vision For the Blind.

### **The desire to hold onto position**

Many of the leaders of DPOS after paving their way to leadership in the Organisation do not want to relinquish power in some cases. They even change the clauses in the Organisations association Constitutions so that they can continue to maintain their positions. This has sometimes led to a source of conflict in the organisation.

### **Greed and selfishness**

Some of the leaders of DPOS want to stay in power for as long as possible. Some leaders in some DPOS are often seen as greedy sometimes converting what is meant as the general good of the group into their own personal good.

### **They fail to disseminate information.**

Some of these leaders can write project proposals when funded, they don't explain to the general membership how they are implementing workshops and training programmes are all for the top-rank executive members.

Now society, government authorities, community stakeholders believe all of us are the same even though there are leaders among us that are fighting to change the system. I am using this document as awareness to the disabled to change their negative behaviour and the leaders to forget about selfish desires. The SLUDI should take action to the proliferation of DPOS so that all disabled can benefit from the enacted Disability Act. We can only enjoy the provision in the Act if we can speak with one voice, one mind and the same Vision and Mission which is fighting against the negative perception of the people towards disabled people. The newly formed Commission is not to lead us as the early leaders of DPOS did before because it brought about separation.

### **Action points:**

1. Awareness raising campaign about the importance of one voice as disabled people through SLUDI and the Commission.
2. SLUDI to reunite smaller groups to the others using the round table settlement.
3. The committee, SLUDI, MDAS should put guiding policies to form DPOS.

A workshop to disseminate the guiding principles. A high level of leadership training, organisational conflict resolution training for the DPOS, Commissioners and the Ministry concerned.

### **Written by:**

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