

# Pan-African Experiences of Autism:

Transforming  
Rights into  
Reality

A Practical  
Conference  
Aimed at Creating  
Working Partnerships to  
Develop Autism Services

4 & 5 December 2017  
The British Council, Freetown, Sierra Leone



Organised by Stepping Forward and Disability Africa with The British Council, Freetown, Sierra Leone

## Background

There are very few studies on autism in the African context but it is clear that specialist autism support services are limited across the continent - and in some areas are non-existent. Just 53 publications were identified in a recent review of research into autism in Africa (Franz et al, March 2017), but findings suggest a substantial need for large-scale clinical, training, research and awareness-raising programmes to improve the lives of people who live with autism in Sub-Saharan Africa. The UN Secretary-General has urged the international community to focus on autism globally, 'to address stigma, lack of awareness and inadequate support structures'.

Globally many autistic children and adults are living difficult lives, denied education, support and acceptance, and often prevented from participating in family and community life. In resource-poor settings in particular, the lack of opportunities for support and education, accompanied by the profound and isolating stigma that can accompany disability, can put individuals and families in intolerable and often dangerous situations.

## Generating Support & Action for Change

To genuinely improve the everyday lives of people living with autism there is an urgent need for

increased support for awareness-raising programmes – and for sharing the latest developments in good practice, including in education, in research and in social care. As elsewhere, this complex process of social change necessarily involves multiple agencies - within the education sector, at NGO level, from within the community and at government policy level.

This is a practical conference aimed at developing working partnerships to transform rights into reality. The conference will bring together a selection of best practice and perspectives from African countries, with the aim of providing opportunities for individuals, organisations and others to share experiences, information and to plan genuine strategies for transformative action.

The event will explore how we can strengthen, support and widen best practice and what research needs should be prioritised. It will seek to identify resources and form partnerships to build capacity in education, training, social care, awareness-raising, as well as to explore future networking possibilities.

*The conference will be aimed firmly at action and at developing future collaborative partnerships - international, continental, regional and national – to contribute towards the enhancement of capacity.*

## Costs

There is no cost to attend the conference and lunch and refreshments will be provided free of charge to attendees.

If you are interested in attending the conference please email your details and your interest (in one or two sentences) to [mike@disability-africa.org](mailto:mike@disability-africa.org) Please also indicate if you are happy for your contact details to be circulated at the conference to delegates.

This is a draft conference programme and may be subject to amendment and change.

Attendees are asked to check with the organisers at [info@stepping-forward.org.uk](mailto:info@stepping-forward.org.uk) or [mike@disability-africa.org](mailto:mike@disability-africa.org) if this affects their participation.

Updates can also be found at:

[www.stepping-forward.org.uk](http://www.stepping-forward.org.uk)

[www.disability-africa.org](http://www.disability-africa.org)



**DISABILITY  
AFRICA**  
CHANGING CHILDREN'S LIVES

## Day One

<b>9.30</b>	Welcome & Introductions by Chair, Martyna Foday, Freetown Teachers College
<b>10.00</b>	Simon Ingram-Hill, Director British Council Sierra Leone Opening speech by Hon. Rugiatu Turay, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare, Gender & Children's Affairs
<b>10.30</b>	Presentation One by Parent/Carer Virginia George, Sierra Leone;
<b>11.00</b>	Tea/coffee
<b>11.30</b>	Current Situation of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Africa – A Review; Dr. Muideen O. Bakare, M.B.B.S, FMCPsych, MNIM <i>Consultant Psychiatrist &amp; Head, Clinical Services and Training Child &amp; Adolescent Unit, Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Enugu, Nigeria</i>
<b>12.15</b>	Q and A
<b>12.45 – 1.45</b>	Lunch
<b>1.45 – 2.00</b>	Presentation Two by Self-Advocate
<b>2.00</b>	Autism Understanding & Educational Support: Andy Nowak, Queensmill School, UK/Disability Africa
<b>2.25</b>	The Work of the Autism Council of Sierra Leone: John Koroma, Chair
<b>2.50</b>	The Browne-Penn School, Freetown: Alice Browne and Mary Penn-Trinity
<b>3.15</b>	Tea Break
<b>3.45 – 4.45</b>	Dawn Cooper-Barnes, co-founder of the Autism Society of Liberia with Q & A

## Day Two

<b>9.30</b>	Welcome
<b>9.40</b>	Presentation by Ministry of Education
<b>10.00</b>	Presentation Three by Parent/Carer: Mary Penn-Trinity
<b>10.15</b>	Disability & the Right to Education, Tsitsi Chataika, University of Zimbabwe
<b>11.30</b>	Tea/coffee
<b>12.00</b>	Improving Outcomes for Children with Autism – Practical Steps <i>Small group discussions led by speakers and NGO partners</i>
	<b>Next Steps Workshop 1</b> Inclusion & Visibility: Securing Rights for Disabled Children Led by Disability Africa
	<b>Next Steps Workshop 2</b> Strategies for Advocacy & Support: What is Required? Led by Dawn Cooper-Barnes, Autism Society of Liberia
	<b>Next Steps Workshop 3</b> The Right to Education: What Can We Do Now? Led by Tsitsi Chataika, University of Zimbabwe
	<b>Next Steps Workshop 4</b> Support for Parents & Carers Led by Virginia George, parent/carer
<b>1.00</b>	Lunch
<b>2.00</b>	Presentation Four by parent/carer
	Feedback & Plenary
<b>4.00</b>	Close



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