
Continental Plan of Action

for the
African Decade of Persons with Disabilities

(1999-2009)



African Union

Preamble

The Continental Plan of Action is aimed at implementing priority activities on disability during the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (1999-2009), which was proclaimed by the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government during their 35th Session held in Algiers, Algeria in July 1999. The formal Declaration to support the Decade was subsequently adopted by the 36th Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Lome, Togo in July 2000.

The Plan of Action is the outcome of the Pan-African Conference on the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities which was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 4 to 7 February 2002. The Plan of Action is primarily to serve as a guideline for member States in the formulation of their national programmes on disability issues as well as in putting in place mechanisms for the implementation of the Decade's objectives.

Throughout the Plan of Action, the terms 'people with disabilities', 'disabled persons' and 'disabled people' are used interchangeably, reflecting accepted usage in different countries. Similarly, the OAU and AU (African Union) are used interchangeably in view of the transition of the OAU to the AU.

Preface

- ♦ The Action Plan of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities is intended to provide guidance to member States and Governments of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) in achieving the goal of the Decade – the full participation, equality and empowerment of people with disabilities in Africa.
- ♦ The Plan of Action was adopted by the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government at their 38th Session held in Durban, South Africa in July 2002.
- ♦ The Plan of Action should form part of the launch of the African Union.
- ♦ The Plan of Action should be taken into consideration in the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD).

- ♦ Member states should consult disabled people's organisations (DPOs) in the implementation of the Plan of Action.
- ♦ The African Rehabilitation Institute (ARI) which is the specialized agency of the OAU relating to disability issues on the continent, will assist governments and Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) at continental, regional and national levels to implement the Plan of Action.
- ♦ The Plan of Action is intended for use by the OAU, ARI and DPOs as an instrument to monitor national governments' progress in achieving the goal of the Decade.
- ♦ Governments and State organs should take responsibility for the successful implementation of the Decade Plan of Action.
- ♦ A special fund should be set-up by governments at the OAU level to facilitate the implementation of Decade activities at continental, regional and national levels.

Continental Plan of Action for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities

I. Introduction

The United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983 – 1992) was a period in which United Nations (UN) member States were expected to implement the World Programme of Action Concerning People with Disabilities. The Decade raised many expectations on the part of disabled people everywhere. It had been hoped that after the UN Decade, the quality of life of disabled people in the world would have improved and that they would be part of mainstream society. While some States did something of note during the Decade, others just let it pass by.

2. The UN Decade of Disabled Persons had its successes and failures. The following are some of its successes which were more pronounced in the northern hemisphere than elsewhere:
 - ♦ It created an opportunity for disabled people to meet globally to discuss their issues;
 - ♦ It resulted in an improvement in attitudes in some parts of the world towards people with disabilities;
 - ♦ It resulted in the formulation of the Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities;
 - ♦ It led to the creation of more organizations of disabled people during the Decade than at any other time, and to the strengthening of those already in existence;
 - ♦ It led to the creation of the African Rehabilitation Institute (ARI) by the Organisation of African Unity to spearhead disability issues in Africa.

3. The following problems were observed, however:
 - ♦ The UN Decade was not well publicized by the UN; and some governments, despite supporting the UN Resolution, did nothing to promote the Decade;

- ✦ The UN itself and many governments did not provide adequate funding for the Decade activities;
 - ✦ The funds that were mobilised for the Decade were not adequately monitored, resulting in ineffectiveness of some programmes;
 - ✦ The UN Decade was, by and large, a global approach to the problems of disability and the solutions that were offered were general and global – or based on assumptions of availability of economic and technical resources.
4. The experience of the UN Decade led to calls for a Decade of Disabled People in various continents, including Africa, providing a local approach to the problems of disability and thus developing local solutions to the problems.
 5. An Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993 – 2002) has benefited from the commitment of governments of the region to the Proclamation of the Decade, which has been signed by 41 governments. The establishment of a Trust Fund for the Decade proved to be a useful, though not a sufficient source of funding for Decade-related initiatives. Annual meetings of the Regional Inter-Agency Committee for Asia and the Pacific (RICAP) Sub-Committee on Disability-Related Concerns¹, comprising representatives of government, UN specialized agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and DPOs, provided a valuable opportunity for information exchange and the development of cooperation on disability-related matters within the region. A mid-term assessment indicated significant progress in achieving set targets.
 6. In 1990 the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, emphasised the need to pay special attention to persons with disabilities. In the same year the World Summit for Children

¹ The RICAP Sub-Committee of Disability-related Concerns is now known as the Thematic Working Group on Disability-related Concerns.

in New York recognised the importance of children's rights including those with disabilities.

7. Article XIII of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child adopted by the 26th OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in 1990, calls for special care and assistance to mentally and physically disabled children with a view to ensuring their dignity, promoting their self-reliance and active participation in the community.
8. The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted in 1981 states "Every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind such as race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status". This includes people with disability.
9. The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 placed significant emphasis on promoting the rights of persons with disabilities. The 1995 Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen promotes educational and employment opportunities without distinction on the basis of race, national, origin, gender, age, religion and disability.
10. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons (No 159) of 1983, ratified by 73 countries² promotes the participation of disabled persons in and their contribution to the world of work. The UNESCO Salamanca Declaration and Framework of Action for special educational needs of 1994 promote education for all, including persons with disabilities.
11. The 1996 Beijing Platform of Action for Women states that "Women are poorer because they have fewer economic

² Number of ratifications by December 2001.

opportunities and less autonomy than men". Women with disabilities have even fewer economic opportunities and less autonomy than non-disabled women. They have the least access to education and training facilities and economic resources and are hardly ever involved in the decision making process.

II. Emergence of the African Decade

12. Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs), in collaboration with the OAU, held a number of meetings at which the idea of having an African Decade was discussed. Extensive consultations were carried out between DPOs, non- governmental organisations, UN Agencies, the African Rehabilitation Institute, governments and other stakeholders.
13. The African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (1999-2009) is the result of a recommendation made by the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) during its 22nd Session in April 1999 in Windhoek, Namibia, and adopted by the 35th Session of the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Algiers, Algeria in July 1999. A formal Declaration of the Decade was subsequently adopted by the 36th Session of the OAU Heads of State and Government in Lome, Togo in July 2000.
14. Responsibility for organizing the Decade was given to the African Rehabilitation Institute (ARI), a specialized agency of the OAU, headquartered in Harare, Zimbabwe, with regional offices located in Dakar, Senegal (for West Africa) Brazzaville, Congo (for Central Africa) and Harare (for Southern Africa). ARI shares this responsibility and will collaborate in the planning of Decade activities with DPOs, in particular the Pan African Federation of Disabled Persons (PAFOD), the African Union of the Blind (AFUB), governments and other regional organisations of persons with disabilities.

15. It is worth noting that African states have so far made no commitments to provide financial support to the implementation of the African Decade; thus two years have passed without implementation of any programme of activities due to lack of financial resources.

III Goal of the Decade

16. The goal of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities is the full participation, equality and empowerment of people with disabilities in Africa.

IV. Objectives

17. The Declaration of the Decade calls upon OAU member States to study the situation of persons with disabilities, with a view to formulating measures favouring equalization of opportunities, full participation and their independence in society. Among other actions, member States are called upon to:
 - ✦ Formulate or reformulate policies and national programmes that encourage the full participation of persons with disabilities in social and economic development;
 - ✦ Create or reinforce national disability coordination committees, and ensure effective representation of disabled persons and their organisations;
 - ✦ Support community-based service delivery, in collaboration with international development agencies and organizations;
 - ✦ Promote more efforts that encourage positive attitudes towards children, youth, women and adults with disabilities, and the implementation of measures to ensure their access to rehabilitation, education, training and employment, as well as to cultural and sports activities and access to the physical environment;
 - ✦ Develop programmes that alleviate poverty amongst disabled people and their families;

- ✦ Put in place programmes that create greater awareness conscientiousness of communities and governments relating to disability;
- ✦ Prevent disability by promoting peace and paying attention to other causes of disability;
- ✦ Mainstream disability on the social economic and political agendas of African governments;
- ✦ Spearhead the implementation of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities, and ensure the use of the Standard Rules as a basis for policy and legislation to protect the interests of disabled people in Africa;
- ✦ Apply all OAU and UN human rights instruments to promote and monitor the rights of persons with disabilities.

V Implementing Partners

18. For the goal of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities to be achieved, the Decade Plan of Action should be implemented by:
- ✦ Government line ministries and departments
 - ✦ Disabled people's organizations
 - ✦ The OAU/AU and its specialized agencies as well as the Regional Economic Communities (RECs)
 - ✦ International organizations including the United Nations and its specialized agencies
 - ✦ Social partners (organizations of employers and workers)
 - ✦ Non-governmental organizations
 - ✦ Religious organizations
 - ✦ Other civil society organizations
 - ✦ Individuals committed to the full participation, equality and empowerment of people with disabilities in the African Continent.

Objective 1

19. To formulate and implement national policies, programmes and legislation to promote the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities.
20. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
- a. Review and, where necessary, amend through their parliaments and national assemblies, all legislation that impacts negatively on the lives of people with disabilities;
 - b. Pass and promulgate, through their parliaments and national assemblies, enabling disability-related legislation aiming at equal opportunity;
 - c. Amend, through their parliaments and national assemblies, constitutional bills of rights to include a non-discriminatory clause on the basis of disability;
 - d. Establish parliamentary committees on disability;
 - e. Develop disability-friendly policies and programme

Objective 2

21. To promote the participation of persons with disabilities in the process of economic and social development.
22. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
- a. Develop and implement a strategy to promote the recruitment of women and men with disabilities by employers of all kinds;
 - b. Develop and implement a strategy to promote opportunities for entrepreneurs with disabilities;
 - c. Develop and implement a strategy to promote training opportunities for women and men with disabilities in mainstream training programmes;
 - d. Take adequate account of the economic empowerment requirements of people with disabilities in both rural and urban areas;

- e. Develop and promote preferential procurement strategies in favour of persons with disabilities;
- f. Provide incentives that encourage participation of persons with disabilities in the economy;
- g. Involve disabled persons and their organizations in the development, establishment and provision of social security services.

Objective 3

- 23. To promote the self-representation of people with disabilities in all public decision-making structures.
- 24. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
 - a. Develop strategies for the effective inclusion and efficient participation of disabled members of parliament or national assemblies;
 - b. Establish disability desks in the office of the President or Prime Minister and at all levels of government;
 - c. Include at least one disabled member in their representation of five to the African Parliament;
 - d. Include disabled people in all political and line functions of the African Union;
 - e. Promote and encourage the development, by all political parties, of party policies and manifestos relating to equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Objective 4

- 25. To enhance support services for disabled persons.
- 26. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
 - a. Facilitate the provision of technical aids, assistive devices and equipment, personal assistance and interpreter services (including sign language and tactile interpretation), free of

charge or at a cost related to their means, to persons with disabilities to facilitate mobility, communication and activities of daily living;

- b. Support the design, development, production, distribution and servicing of assistive devices and equipment for people with disabilities, adapted to local conditions, and dissemination of knowledge about them;
- c. Design and implement personal assistance programmes in such a way that the persons with disabilities using the programmes have a decisive influence on the way in which the programmes are delivered.

Objective 5

- 27. To promote special measures for children, youth, women and elderly persons with disabilities.
- 28. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
 - a. Ensure access to reproductive health services which are relevant to women with disabilities;
 - b. Ensure access to early childhood development programmes, enrolment of school-going age disabled children in primary, secondary and tertiary education;
 - c. Develop and implement special measures to facilitate full and equal participation of youth with disabilities in training and employment, arts, sports, culture, science and technology.

Objective 6

- 29. To ensure and improve access to rehabilitation, education, training, employment, sports, the cultural and physical environment.
- 30. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
 - i) *Education*
 - a. Establish policies to ensure that girls and boys with disabilities

have access to relevant education in integrated settings at all levels, paying particular attention to the requirements of children in rural areas;

- b. Provide special education, where education is not possible in integrated settings for children with disabilities;
- c. Allocate specific budgets for the education of children with disabilities;
- d. Include a module on teaching of children with special needs in the curricula of teacher training courses;
- e. Provide training to teachers in mainstream schools, to facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities;
- f. Design and produce specialized teaching materials;
- g. Foster partnership between schools, families and other members of educational teams;
- h. Promote inclusive education.

ii) *Training*

- a. Train youth, women and men with disabilities in relevant marketable skills, where possible in mainstream settings;
- b. Promote vocational rehabilitation and, where necessary, retraining opportunities for people who acquire a disability in the course of their working lives;
- c. Train people with disabilities in business skills, including marketing and management.

iii) *Rehabilitation*

Develop and implement rehabilitation programmes, with guidance from ARI.

iv) *Employment*

- a. Ratify and implement the ILO Convention No.159 concerning Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) to ensure entry to the labour market of persons with disabilities;

- b. Promote learnerships³ or apprenticeships to facilitate the employment of youth with disabilities;
- c. Develop and implement strategies to promote employment of persons with disabilities, including tax rebates and incentives.

v) *Access*

- a. Develop and implement regulations to promote universal design and physical accessibility;
- b. Promote accessible information in alternative formats, including large print, Braille, electronic and audio formats;
- c. Promote the availability of sign language interpretation at public meetings and in the media.

vi) *Sports*

- a. Create an enabling environment to enhance the effective and equal participation of disabled sports women, men and youth at local, national, regional, continental and international fora;
- b. Promote and develop sports and cultural activities to enable the integration of disabled children in all centres of learning.

Objective 7

31 To prevent causes of disability.

32. To achieve this objective, Member States should:

- a. Allocate sufficient resources for the prevention of disability;
- b. Introduce an information campaign or strengthen existing information on the causes of disability, focused in particular on pregnant women and mothers;
- c. Supplement 'mother and child' programmes with an on-going programme of scientific and medical research;

³ Learnerships are new paraprofessional and vocational education and training programmes. They combine theory and practice and culminate in a recognized qualification.

- d. Introduce a system of early identification and referral, or strengthen existing systems, to minimize the occurrence of secondary disability;
- e. Introduce and implement stringent road safety policies, or strengthen existing policies;
- f. Introduce a systematic land-mine clearance programme, where mines exist, or strengthening of existing programmes;
- g. Develop and implement an awareness and education campaign against domestic violence;
- h. Introduce and enforce occupational safety and health standards, and strengthen existing enforcement mechanisms;
- i. Design and implement an awareness-raising campaign relating to abuse of drugs and alcohol;
- j. Provide to persons with disabilities, particularly infants and children, appropriate medical care within the same system as other members of society;
- k. Train local community workers to participate in areas such as early detection of impairments, the provision of primary assistance and referral to appropriate services;
- l. Provide information on HIV/AIDS to persons with disabilities, in all accessible formats.

Objective 8

- 33. To promote and protect disability rights as human rights.
- 34. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
 - a. Develop an African Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities;
 - b. Include disability issues in the implementation of human rights instruments at national level;
 - c. Support the development of sign language and recognize it as an official language of deaf people;

- d. Support the development of tactile language as a language of deaf/blind people;
- e. Allocate overall responsibility for coordination of disability-related policies, programmes and services to the President's or Prime Minister's Office, and establish a disability desk in all Government ministries and State organs.

Objective 9

- 35. To support the development of and strengthen Disabled Persons' Organizations.
- 36. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
 - a. Develop and implement training programmes for public servants to enhance the provision of disabled-friendly services;
 - b. Promote and facilitate the establishment of National Federations of Disabled Persons Organizations;
 - c. Promote and facilitate, through financial support, local and national representation of disabled persons.

Objective 10

- 37. To mobilize resources.
- 38. To achieve this objective, Member States should:
 - a. Set up a special fund to facilitate the implementation of Decade activities, and make resources available to ARI and DPOs at continental, regional, national and local levels, for the co-ordination and successful implementation of the Decade activities;
 - b. Include a disability component in all Government budgets and budgetary allocations in all their line functions;
 - c. Ensure the inclusion of disability as a criterion in Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes, and other programmes for consideration by international donors.

Objective 11

39. To provide mechanisms for coordination, monitoring and evaluation of the activities of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities.

40. To achieve this objective,

Member States should:

- a. Establish and strengthen National Coordinating Committees with emphasis on the adequate and effective representation of disabled persons and their organizations and define their roles in these Committees;
- b. Strengthen the administrative and technical capacity of ARI, at both continental and regional levels, to enable it to effectively co-ordinate and monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action for the Decade;
- c. Establish a panel of experts with a majority of people with disabilities, nominated by DPOs, to serve as advisors to ARI's technical team;
- d. Submit reports on the implementation of the Decade Plan of Action to the OAU Secretariat;

The OAU should:

- a. Call upon OAU Heads of State and Government to appoint a Special Rapporteur on Disability to ensure implementation, monitoring and reporting of the Decade activities;
- b. Report on the implementation of the Decade Plan of Action to the Assembly of Heads of State and Government on a biennial basis.

Objective 12

41. To advocate and raise disability awareness in general, and awareness of the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities in particular.

42. To achieve this objective, Member States should:

- a. Develop and implement a media and communications strategy for the African Decade, including the development of an African Decade website;
- b. Develop a media Code of Good Practice relating to disability;
- c. Develop and promote cultural activities and sports events by people with disabilities, to raise public awareness of their abilities;
- d. Formulate and implement a comprehensive and protracted awareness raising campaign aimed at improving society's perception of women with disabilities;
- e. Translate the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities into national languages and make them available in all alternative formats⁴;
- f. Encourage research on disability-related topics of relevance to Africa, at every level, and disseminate research findings;
- g. Establish a database or databases, compiling disability-related information of different kinds;
- h. Foster international exchange of information within Africa, so that African countries can learn from each other;
- i. Promote information exchange within countries, for example, through the establishment of disability resource centres and providing information to persons with disabilities and their families.

⁴ Including Braille, large print, audio cassettes and electronic formats.

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