

STATUS OF DISABLED PERSONS LIVES IN FOOD CRISIS WORRYING!

Thomas Ong'olo

Across the region, the spring revolution has been witnessed in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Similar citizen uprisings have been seen in street matches and protests calling for a reduction of high prices of food and cost of living in a number of African countries. We have seen persons with disability joining demonstrations as citizens who bear the greatest impact and who constitute for 20% of the population living in poverty.

While different reports have documented how the standard of living has deteriorated in the last year among populations, due to escalating food and fuel prices, it has been postulated that persons with disabilities are significantly affected.

According to a new report, more than 90 percent of sub-Saharan Africa has been affected by the rising commodity costs. In order to meet their basic needs, citizens have reduced spending on leisure activities and purchases of luxury items. The economic downturn in the region has also made it difficult for many disabled persons to save money for the future and it has also reduced agriculture and business opportunities for many entrepreneurs due to declining purchasing power.

Meetings with disability activists in different conferences around the continent have echoed this concern. Recently in Accra, Ghana, a group of leaders, activists and managers in the blindness movement issued a statement calling on governments to initiate safety nets that cushion disabled persons. "There is an urgent need for the African governments to address the rising cost of food prices in order to improve the living standards



of persons with disabilities".

The latest update from the African Platform on Social Protection notes that millions of persons with disability are sleeping hungry and more are in the margins of starvation while others have lack of food related conditions. Not only has this crisis been reported in the refugees camps in the horn of Africa, but among asylum seekers in the Southern Africa region. The food crisis is a great concern and this is being worsened by a lack of disability inclusive policy among humanitarian aid agencies. Persons with disabilities in many of these points must also push and scramble for food rations in long and intimidating cues, and this comes with a price.

This is a call on the African disability rights movement to actively contribute to the civil society discourse as partners promoting proactive strategies and inclusion of persons with disability.

The Global Disability Rights Library: An Off-line Tool Reaching Beyond the Web

This June marked the launch of the Global Disability Rights Library (GDRL) prototype, a digital library that moves web documents onto the subscriber's LAN (Local Area Network) that can be accessed on-line and off-line. The GDRL will provide users with the most up-to-date and significant information on disability rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This tool will prove to be invaluable for organisations in developing countries with limited access to the internet. Users will also

have the opportunity to share feedback with GDRL staff during the prototype period.

“We are excited to be able to begin sharing the prototype version of the Global Disability Rights Library with the public because we need everyone’s help in making it an outstanding resource,” says Andrea Shettle, GDRL program manager. “Disability rights advocates, policy makers, and other stakeholders in developing countries deserve easier access to a rich body of digital knowledge. These websites, videos, and electronic publications can support their work in improving the lives of people with disabilities in developing countries. The GDRL is still very much a work in progress. We need disabled people’s organizations, service providers, government personnel, families, and people with disabilities around

the world to start using it and telling us how they want us to improve the library.”

GDRL is a collaborative project managed by the U.S. International Council on Disabilities (USICD) and the University of Iowa’s WiderNet Project with funding support from USAID. Under the current project period, 60 organisations, universities, advocates, and other groups with restricted access to the internet in developing countries will receive a free off-line version of the digital library in an eGranary. An eGranary is an off-line platform that can hold and process a considerable collection of digital resources. The eGranary also has an interface and functionality that is similar to the web, which increases the ease-of-use for users who may be familiar with the web.

People who do have internet access can now visit the on-line version of the prototype GDRL at <http://gdrl.org>.

To read more about the GDRL project please visit: <http://www.usicd.org/index.cfm/global-disability-rights-library>

Mainstreaming Disability in Development Cooperation Conference Held in Oslo

In cooperation with the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability, SADPD attended “Mainstreaming Disability in Development Cooperation,” a seminar hosted by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). The seminar took place in Oslo, Norway on 27-29th March 2011. The seminar gathered more than 60 representatives from UN agencies, multilateral organizations, Disabled People’s Organizations (DPOs), development agencies and regional bodies. Both Northern and Southern representatives were present. The aim of the seminar was to identify obstacles that encourage the exclusion of people with disabilities in development cooperation and identify possible solutions. The main obstacles found were the lack of awareness and needs of people with disabilities, lack of sufficient statistics and indicators, absence of political interest and attention and finally, lack of guidelines on how to mainstream. The main

solution identified was to establish a focal point in development aid agencies or in ministries responsible for disability. Furthermore, the organisations of persons with disabilities must be strengthened and regarded as partners in development. While in Oslo, SADPD held high-level meetings with:

- a. Ms Akiko Ito, Chief of UN DESA Secretariat
- b. Ms Judy Heumann, US State Department
- c. Ms Catherine Ruff, GTZ
- d. Ms Maria Veronica Reina, GPDD Executive Director
- e. UN Commission for Human Rights

For more information about the seminar please visit: <http://www.norad.no/en/About+Norad/Seminars/Disability+Mainstreaming>