



Strengthening representation of persons with disabilities in local councils in South Africa

Major lessons learned

The project has shown that people with disabilities, who have a relatively limited level of education, can play a role in decision making processes of local councils. Following targeted training, people with disabilities can obtain political skills at the same level as non-disabled representatives.

The advocacy and lobbying manual and other materials and courses developed during the project were later used in other provinces.



Photo: www.wacc.org.uk

Mike Mphahawa, Cape Town, producing a weekly programme on disability and democracy for Democracy Radio

Background

Before the election in 1999, the coalition of self-help groups Disabled People of South Africa (DPSA) had worked to include people with disabilities into ANC's lists of candidates for local councils. After the election, when persons with disabilities were listed for election for the first time, DPSA, in collaboration with the Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People (DSI) trained 31 elected representatives with disabilities using materials developed by the University of Cape Town.

It is hoped that examples of strong local representatives with disabilities will encourage other political parties to include persons with disabilities into their lists

During the nineties, DPSA developed numerous national sector and thematic policies for the mainstreaming of disability. The project offered an opportunity to implement these at province and district levels.

Location:

Western Cape Province and Northern Province (now Limpopo Province), South Africa

Title in Danish:

Lokalprogram for handicappedes rettigheder og egenrepræsentation

Year of implementation:

2001-2003

Funding:

DKK 4,8 mill (USD 800,000) channelled through the Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People

Objectives of the project

The overall objectives of the project were

- To strengthen the capacity for representation - and in the long run increase the number - of persons with disabilities in parliament as well as in province and district councils.
- To increase the mainstreaming of disability in province and county plans as well as in sectoral and thematic plans.

More specifically, the objectives were:

1. To ensure that all persons with disabilities, elected for local councils, are trained in effective representation, lobbying and advocacy.
2. To train members of DPSA's self-help groups in researching, analysing and presenting local politics in order for them to support the elected council members.
3. To support and advise DPSA's self help groups with regard to public service delivery and income generation activities through the activities of the elected council representatives and DPSA representatives.
4. To initiate regional network activities as part of the African Decade of Disabled Persons (2000-2009).
5. To increase communication within the disability organisations through training in sign language and the use of compensating devices for blindness.



Activities included

- Workshops and seminars for elected representatives and DPSA members.
- Visits to self-help groups.
- Leadership training and advocacy training for self-help groups.
- Production of an advocacy and lobbying manual for training facilitators with disabilities.
- Development of information materials, policy papers, research documents and programmes on various topics for the use of authorities at province and district levels.
- Campaigns within five themes: training and income generation; social security; accessible transportation; inclusive education; and recognition of sign language as an official South African language.

Some challenges during the project and their solutions

People with disabilities were elected in one tenth of the units where they were included on ANC's lists of candidates. This was less than expected by DPSA, so representatives with disabilities were invited from other provinces than the two original project provinces.

Removing barriers for the full participation of more marginalised groups within the disability organisation, such as people with visual and hearing impairments, requires planning and training of members of organisations and councils.

Results

- 31 representatives with disabilities elected for local councils were trained in advocacy and lobbying.
- 30 members of DPSAs self-help groups were trained to research, analyse, and present policies as support for elected representatives and as links to local self-help groups.
- A disability strategy was developed for each of the participating provinces
- Two counties established a disability function in the administration (already existing at province level)
- County authorities in five districts set up committees to work for the establishment of disability units in district administration.

Lessons learned from the project have been documented in newsletters and presented in connection with events of the African Decade of Disabled Persons. Exchange visits with disability organisations in other African countries and presentations to international disability organisations have taken place. The project has been presented to the World Bank's Disability Unit.

Further Reading:

Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People
[Strategy for South Africa](#)

http://www.disability.dk/site/viewdoc.php?doc_id=642

South Africa

[Integrated National Disability Strategy White Paper, 1997](#)

<http://www.info.gov.za/whitepapers/1997/disability.htm>

Disabled People of South Africa
<http://www.dpsa.org.za/>

Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People www.disability.dk

Danida File No:
104.N.288.b.2