



Supporting the establishment of district based disability organisations in Uganda

Major lessons learned

When persons with disabilities are directly represented in decision making structures from village to parliament level, there is great potential for influencing relevant policies and to monitor their implementation.

It is a constant challenge for national and district based disability organisations to maintain the balance between being advocate and watchdog for the human rights of persons with disabilities and at the same time meet local self-help groups' needs for services in health, education and employment.

Background

Uganda has a unique and mature history of mainstreaming disability into policies and decision making structures.

The constitution from 1995 stipulates that five persons with disabilities, of which at least one must be a woman, are allocated seats in the national parliament. In 1997, persons with disabilities were secured representation in all local councils at village, parish, sub-county, municipality, and district level (at district and sub-county level one man and one woman is elected).

Before the local elections in 1997 the umbrella organisation National Union of Disabled Persons in Uganda (NUDIPU) expanded considerably with the huge challenge of mobilising persons with disabilities and establishing district and sub-county structures. Today the organisation is represented in cross-disability district unions covering all of Uganda and involved in developing Uganda's Poverty Eradication Action Plan at central level.

Location:

Uganda

Title in Danish:

Distriktsbaserede handicaporganisationer

Year of implementation:

1996-2008 in three phases

Funding:

DKK 33,733,000 (USD 5,4 mill) from Danida channelled through the Danish Council of Organizations of Disabled People



Photo: Egmont Højskolen

Objectives of the project

The overall goal of the project is to improve the standard of living of persons with disabilities through working for equal opportunities, respect for human rights and full participation in development processes in Uganda.

During the first phase of the project (1996-2000) specific objectives were

- to mobilise people with disabilities
- to build capacity of representatives in political fora and of self-help groups
- to lobby and advocate for inclusion of disability aspects into national sector policies

Objectives of the second phase (2000-2004) were

- to lobby and advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities.
- to build capacity of NUDIPU's head office and establish structures for the sustainability of the organisation.
- to support opportunities for economic empowerment of persons with disabilities.

For the third phase (2004-2008) two objectives were formulated:

- to improve access to poverty-reducing programmes for persons with disabilities
- to improve NUDIPU's institutional capacity for advocacy at all levels in relation to access to poverty-reducing programmes.



Strategies for implementation of the third phase are:

1. Human resources development
2. Organisational development
3. Lobbying and advocacy
4. Collecting and communicating information
5. Collaboration, coordination and networking for a unified disability movement

Activities have included

- Workshops and advocacy training seminars at all levels.
- Establishment of disability offices in all districts (often in conjunction with the Danida-funded special needs education programme SNE/EARS).
- Accountancy seminars for administrators
- Education, rehabilitation and income generating activities, of which some would qualify for access to micro credit schemes.
- Establishment of self-help groups with regard to education and rehabilitation
- Toolbox for capacity building of district and county branches of the organisation.
- A bicycle for each of the 1000 sub-counties and assistive devices for district leaders and employees in the NUDIPU secretariat.

Other lessons learned

Based on experience from Bangladesh, an innovation in the third phase is to link up with other (non-disability) local organisations. The integration of disability related activities into other organisations gives them the opportunity to develop their capacity for inclusion. At the same time it is expected that NUDIPU's local structures will be sustained in a more cost effective way than with separate offices. Experience from South Africa has shown that expenses for staffing of provincial disability offices are difficult to maintain in the long run.

During its phases, the project has scaled up from covering a limited number of districts to national level and back to focusing on 12 districts according to the objectives of each phase and in order to enable capacity building efforts to take root.

Districts are selected based on indications of interest.

The very fast expansion of the organisation in the nineties and the brain drain from the NUDIPU top into the national parliament has required targeted organisational capacity building at central level. It has taken time before focus could move to capacity building at district and sub-county levels. Professionalisation of the organisation has happened through hiring highly skilled employees at central level and introducing a new administrative system. Further rationalisation of the internal organisation may be needed.

There are recommendations to sharpen the prioritisation of NUDIPU's various programmes in an overriding strategy. It has been recommended to invite donors for basket funding of NUDIPU's activities based on such a strategy.

Getting all disability organisations (cross and single disability) involved and coordinated in district unions has been and is still a challenge.

Women and girls with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged and need special attention both in the development of disability organisations, and in the process of creating a united voice of women with disabilities at the national level.



Photo: Egmont Højskolen
Members of Uganda's Parliament

Further Reading:

Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People
[Country Strategy for Uganda 2001, DSI Mini-Programme Agreement](http://www.disability.dk/site/themes.php?theme_id=6&action=start§ion_id=4)
http://www.disability.dk/site/themes.php?theme_id=6&action=start§ion_id=4

Read about NUDIPU

http://www.disability.dk/site/viewdoc.php?doc_id=399

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

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