

## VSO Rwanda Disability Programme Overview

### 1. Disability and Disability in Rwanda

#### 1.1 Definitions

VSO adopts a 'social model of disability' which does not focus on the impairment or condition of a person alone but on the interaction between this impairment and the social, attitudinal and environmental circumstances that exist in their society and which can have a 'disabling' impact on the person. While physical, sensory, intellectual, or psychological variations, may cause individual functional limitation or impairments, these do not have to lead to disability unless society fails to take account of and include people regardless of their individual differences.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Law N° 01/2007 dated 20 January 2007 the Government of Rwanda defines 'disability' as "the condition of a person's impairment of health ability he or she should have been in possession, and consequently leading to deficiency compared to others. Furthermore, a person with disability is any individual who was born without congenital abilities like those of others or one who was deprived of such abilities due to disease, accident, conflict or any other reasons which may cause disability"<sup>2</sup>. Whilst this definition focuses on the individual rather than their environment, the disability movement in working hard to introduce in to government policies and programmes greater recognition of environmental factors.

#### 1.2 Facts and figures

People with disabilities in Rwanda and other developing countries are over-represented among the poorest people. They have been largely overlooked in the development agenda so far, but the recent focus on poverty reduction strategies is a unique chance to rethink and rewrite that agenda.

The 2002 household census estimated that 3.9% of the national population were PWDs (308,501). A census carried out in 2010 by the Ministry of Health (MINISANTE) and the Ministry of Local Government and Social Affairs (MINALOC) estimated the population of PWDs to be approximately 5% (522,856: 263,928 females and 258,928 males). However, given Rwanda's history of conflict and development, a more realistic representation of PWD in Rwanda is closer to 1.5 million based on estimations by the World Health Organization (WHO) that 15% of any population is likely to be PWD<sup>3</sup>.

#### 1.3 Attitudes towards disability

'Social exclusion' is not a concept that is widely used in Rwanda, but people with disabilities are both actively and passively excluded in Rwandan society. Rwandans do not value disabled people. People with disabilities are seen as objects of charity. They are underestimated and overprotected, and their potential and abilities are not recognised. Children with disabilities are seen as a source of shame and often hidden away. Name-calling is common. Women with disabilities find it difficult to get married. People with disabilities suffer discrimination in employment and health care.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf)  
VSO [http://www.vsointernational.org/Images/A\\_Handbook\\_on\\_Mainstreaming\\_Disability\\_tcm76-21046.pdf](http://www.vsointernational.org/Images/A_Handbook_on_Mainstreaming_Disability_tcm76-21046.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Law n° 01/2007 of 20/01/2007 relating to protection of persons with disabilities in general

<sup>3</sup> WHO (2011) [http://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/index.html).

Family members with disabilities are sometimes passed over in matters of inheritance. Land and assets are given to others who are deemed to be able to make better use of them, thus leaving the person with disabilities dependant on family to support them and removing the opportunity for them to lead independent lives. Negative attitudes are particularly strong towards those with severe disabilities, people with mental and psychosocial disabilities, blind and deaf people.

Whist the situation is changing due to campaigning of civil society and a change of attitude amongst government, stigma and negative perceptions still exist. Legislation and policies now exist to protect the rights of people with disabilities and to improve their quality of life but implementation is slow.

A lot of effort has also gone in to introducing positive terminology in Kinyarwanda for people with disabilities who traditionally would be referred to as 'things', 'objects', 'broken pots'. However, organisations of have been lobbying hard to change to more positive and respectful terms, including through a documentary made by VSO with partners in 2009.

## **2. The Disability Movement in Rwanda**

Civil society organisations of people with disabilities have existed in Rwanda for many years, the oldest is more than thirty years old. Added to this are around forty special schools and centres of various capacity supporting children with a range of disabilities that have traditionally been run by churches, charities and private philanthropists. However organisations lacked unity, coherence and individual and collective capacity.

The first attempts at creating a unifying structure came in the mid 2000s with the creation of a Federation of People with Disabilities which was later enshrined in law. However, the ambiguous nature of this organisation – at once created by law, and therefore technically a government agency, but which also represented civil society – resulted in a lack of progress and an insufficient ownership by government. In 2010, after lobbying by civil society, the government of Rwanda agreed to amend the constitution of Rwanda and to create a National Council for People with Disabilities (in line with the National Council for Youth and for Women). This is a government agency with representative structure at all levels of government administration responsible for mainstreaming disability across government services and development programmes. In response, civil society has organised itself in to an umbrella organisation to serve as a coordinating and representative body for the movement and to build the capacity of member organisations.

There is now a much clearer structure in the disability movement (defined as the group of national and international disability organisations in civil society and other stakeholders aiming to move the disability agenda forward including the government's new National Council of People with Disabilities); government and civil society are both represented and are able to position themselves in relation to each other.

All major disability organisations are members and more are expected to join in 2012:

- The General Association of People with Disabilities of Rwanda (AGHR)
- National Paralympic Committee (NPC)
- National Organisation of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry of Rwanda (NOUSPR)
- Rwanda National Union of the Deaf (RNUD)
- Rwanda Union of the Blind (RUB)
- Association of Deaf Women of Rwanda (ANFSMR)
- Association Centre pour la Paix des Jeunes non voyants-ACPJENV
- Troupe Handicapé Twuzuzany (THT)

Since 2006, when VSO first started to work with the disability movement, organisations have grown in strength individually and collectively. The movement as a whole is becoming more visible, more organised and more professional and is attracting support from an increasing number of international organisations. Challenges remain however, particular funding and capacity in terms of paid professional staff.

As a result of their own initiatives, capacity building support from VSO and other partners, and an increased ability to access other sources of support, our partners have seen many achievements including but not limited to the following:

- Development and passing of the Disability Law (2007) and wide sensitisation and dissemination of the law to people with disabilities, their organisations, the wider community and government bodies.
- Development and passing of Ministerial Decrees, which are effectively instructions to Ministries to put the Law into practice (2009).
- Advocacy at district and national level resulting in inclusion in the Economic Development Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) – the overall development plan for Rwanda.
- Successfully advocating for Rwanda to accept to be the first Ambassadorial Country for the African Decade for People with Disabilities, at the centre of which is a ten-year national programme for mainstreaming disability.
- Development of planning tools and techniques for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the national HIV programmes.
- Delivery of entrepreneurship training and the initiation of income generating activities.
- Development of effective family awareness training for the blind including basic mobility and orientation techniques, the first step in encouraging a blind person to come out of their homes into the community.
- Publication of the first ever Kinyarwanda sign language dictionary, following research into the various signs used around the country.
- Developing innovative techniques of raising awareness on disability and rights through sports and initiating sports clubs at district level.
- Models of good practice including in inclusive teaching methodologies, teaching of sign language by deaf teachers, audiology, occupational therapy, deaf awareness amongst parents and the community, and teaching grade 2 Braille (non-existent in Rwanda).

### **3. The VSO Rwanda programme**

The disability programme in Rwanda began in 2006 with a three-year programme funded by DFID Rwanda (2006-2009). Within this programme we were able to support eight national DPOs, which are effectively the core of the disability movement in Rwanda. Although this large amount of funding to partners has finished, VSO Rwanda is continually seeking funding for further projects and is still able to support volunteer placements aimed at building the capacity of our DPO partners as well as district offices and special schools and centres.

Our key objectives remain the same and we will continue to support our partners through volunteers and through advocacy and capacity building carried out by the country office.

The overall goal of the programme is that ‘the rights of people with disabilities in development are fulfilled’.

The purpose of the programme is that ‘development plans reflect the priorities of people with disabilities and services are responsive to their needs.’

The objectives we work towards are:

1. To mainstream disability in to the policies, programmes and delivery mechanisms of government and other development actors leading to positive impact at grassroots level.

2. To strengthen national organisations of people with disabilities in their capacity for advocacy and to respond to the priorities of their constituents.
3. To improve the quality of services aimed at people with disabilities

In order to achieve our three key priorities our key interventions through volunteers, small grants, capacity building and advocacy relate to:

- direct advocacy towards government in partnership with other organisations in order to raise the profile of disability issues at high level (eg through government working groups and visibility campaigns)
- organisational development (eg management and administration; fundraising; marketing, research; advocacy)
- support to the 'Deaf movement' and access to sign language, audiology and speech therapy services
- inclusive Education and Special Need Education
- support to local authorities to ensure disability is mainstreamed at local government level

We have amongst our partners:

- National Union of Disability Organisations of Rwanda (NUDOR)
- Rwandan Union of the Blind (RUB)
- Rwandan National Union of the Deaf (RNUD)
- General Association of People with Disabilities in Rwanda (AGHR)
- Umbrella of PWDs in the Fight Against AIDS (UPHLS)
- National Paralympic Committee (NPC)
- National Organisation of Users and Survivors of Psychiatry of Rwanda (NOUSPR)
- Butare Centre for the Deaf
- Nyanza District Office
- Musanze District Office
- Ngororero District Office
- Rwanda Aid
- Tubakunde
- Central University Hospital of Kigali
- Rwanda Military Hospital

Through our volunteers we have links with a number of special schools/centres and health institutions. We also work with closely with other international NGOs working in the same sector, including Handicap International and UNICEF.

## **4. 'Mainstreaming' disability in to development**

### **4.1 What is 'disability mainstreaming'?**

VSO Rwanda's key approach is to ensure that disability is mainstreamed throughout Rwanda's development agenda. Mainstreaming is a process of addressing an issue in a structured way at the level of policies, programmes and across organisations. By mainstreaming disability throughout the EDPRS we can promote inclusion and address the barriers that exclude people with disabilities from full and equal participation in society<sup>4</sup>.

### **4.2 Why mainstream disability?**

#### **4.2.1 Because people with disabilities are disproportionately represented amongst the poor**

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<sup>4</sup> VSO Handbook on Mainstreaming Disability [http://www.vsointernational.org/Images/A\\_Handbook\\_on\\_Mainstreaming\\_Disability\\_tcm76-21046.pdf](http://www.vsointernational.org/Images/A_Handbook_on_Mainstreaming_Disability_tcm76-21046.pdf)

The World Bank estimates that 20% of the world's poorest people have some kind of disability,<sup>5</sup> and this is noted in the Preamble (t) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (NCRPD)<sup>6</sup> “Emphasising that the majority of persons with disabilities live in conditions of poverty, and in this regard recognising the critical need to address the negative impact of poverty on person with disabilities.”

#### **4.2.2 Because poverty is a cause and consequence of disability**

The linkage between poverty and disability is strong and goes in both directions. Poverty causes disability through malnutrition, poor health care and dangerous living conditions. Disability can cause poverty by preventing the full participation of disabled people in the economic and social life of their communities, especially if the proper supports and accommodations are not available.<sup>7</sup> As it is demonstrated in the World Report on Disability 2011<sup>8</sup>, the majority of studies find that persons with disabilities have lower employment rates and lower educational attainment than persons without disability and a cross country study of 13 developing countries found disability is associated with a higher probability of being poor. Similarly a study of 20 developing countries found that children in the poorest three quintiles of households in most countries are at greater risk of disability than the others.

#### **4.2.3 Because people with a disability have the right to benefit from development**

This is recognised at international level and national level through the UNCRPD preamble (g) (UNCRPD)<sup>9</sup> “Emphasising the importance of mainstreaming disability issues as an integral part of relevant strategies of sustainable development”, and the preamble to the Rwanda Constitution (11)<sup>10</sup> “Determined to develop human resources, to fight ignorance, to promote technological advancement and the social welfare of the people of Rwanda”.

#### **4.2.4 Because people with disability can and do contribute to development – disability is NOT inability.**

When people with disabilities have access to education, healthcare and appropriate personal support they can achieve as well as the rest of the population. Deaf children in Rwanda who now have access to sign language interpreting support are scoring the highest points in national exams, 2011 saw the first blinds graduates of KIE and NUR. With the qualifications to become employed people with disabilities will contribute to Rwanda’s development through paying taxes, higher consumption of goods and services and will reduce their reliance (and those of family members) on social protection schemes.

In addition they are expected to contribute to development in accordance with Rwanda’s Constitution of 2003 (amended 2010) which states in Article 47 “All citizens have the duty to participate, through work, in the development of the country”.

#### **4.2.5 Because Rwanda will not achieve full development without consideration of *all* citizens**

All of the eight Millennium Development Goals are applicable to people with disabilities as part of the whole population of Rwanda, in particular:

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<sup>5</sup> WHO: [http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215\\_eng.pdf](http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2011/9789240685215_eng.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> UN <http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?navid=12&pid=166> .

<sup>7</sup> WHO:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALPROTECTION/EXTDISABILITY/0,,contentMDK:21249181~menuPK:282717~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:282699,00.html>

<sup>8</sup> WHO (2011) [http://www.who.int/disabilities/world\\_report/2011/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/en/index.html)).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?navid=12&pid=166> .

<sup>10</sup> Rwanda Constitution found in Official Gazette n° Special of 17 June 2010, Year 49 n° Special, 17 June 2010,

- MDG 1 Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger will not be achieved as PWDs are disproportionately over-represented amongst those living in poverty
- The fact that currently only between 1-2% of children with disabilities are attending pre-primary, and primary schools means that Rwanda will not achieve MDG 2 – Universal primary education.<sup>11</sup>

#### **4.2.6 Because Rwanda has made national, regional and international commitments to realising the rights of people with disabilities<sup>12</sup>**

Key pieces of legislation are:

- Rwanda Constitution of 2003 (amended 2010)<sup>13</sup>
- Rwanda ratified the UNCRPD and its optional protocol on 15 December 2008
- The national legal framework clearly upholds the rights of people with disabilities<sup>14</sup>.
- National programme for mainstreaming disability in Rwanda (2010-2019)<sup>15</sup> (part of Ambassadorial Country Status.
- Ambassadorial country status for African decade for people with disabilities<sup>16</sup>
- East Africa Policy on Mainstreaming Disability<sup>17</sup>
- Government of Rwanda Programme 2010-2017<sup>18</sup> and the National Council of People with Disabilities.
- Rwanda Demobilisation and Re-integration Programme<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.2.7 Because, despite huge improvements in recent years, there is still a significant gap between legislation and implementation.**

Though the government of Rwanda has put in place a sufficient and strong legal framework for persons with disabilities, it is observed that, there is a huge gap regarding its implementation. The report on EDPRS I ('Lessons Learned', MINECOFIN) clearly show that disability is not yet fully addressed in Rwanda's development agenda<sup>20</sup>:

"There is room for improvement in regard to mainstreaming cross cutting issues such as; disability, disaster management and risk reduction, regional integration and climate change."

"On average cross-cutting issues such as HIV and AIDS, gender and environment have been taken into account; other areas like disability and regional integration however have not been well integrated. There has been limited reporting on results and monitoring in these areas with few sectors adopting specific indicators or providing disaggregated data."

"Similar to the sector assessments, the districts assessments also show that cross-cutting issues such as HIV and AIDS, gender and environment have been taken into account, but more efforts are needed for areas like disability, disaster management and risk reduction".

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=711>

<sup>12</sup> Full list of key policies available from VSORwanda.

<sup>13</sup> Rwanda Constitution found in Official Gazette n° Special of 17 June 2010, Year 49 n° Special, 17 June 2010,

<sup>14</sup> Various laws exist – more information on arrival

<sup>15</sup> Rwanda: **Ambassador Country for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities**, National Program (2010-2019) First edition (January-December 2010).

<sup>16</sup> <http://africandecade.org/ambassadorial-countries/>

<sup>17</sup> [http://news.eac.int/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=186:pwds-conference-ends&catid=48:eac-latest&Itemid=69](http://news.eac.int/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=186:pwds-conference-ends&catid=48:eac-latest&Itemid=69)

<sup>18</sup> Republic of Rwanda: **Government Program 2010-2017**, October 2010, p. 55, 59.

<sup>19</sup> [www.rdrdc.org.rw/](http://www.rdrdc.org.rw/)

<sup>20</sup> EDPRS I review MINECOFIN [http://www.minecofin.gov.rw/webfm\\_send/2399](http://www.minecofin.gov.rw/webfm_send/2399)

## 5. Initiatives

As shown above, there is a positive legislative environment and strong political will in Rwanda to move forward with the disability rights agenda. There are initiatives underway to address these challenges and implement the policies and programmes that already exist.

### Government:

- As mentioned above, a law to protect the rights of people with disabilities in Rwanda was passed in 2007. The law takes a human rights approach to disability. It was widely disseminated including to representatives of people with disabilities and local authorities. A series of Ministerial Orders were passed in 2009 to put this law in to practice. These are instructions to relevant ministries to make provision for people with disabilities in areas such as communication, transport, health care, identification, sport and culture.
- Also mentioned above, in 2010 the constitution of Rwanda was amended to create a National Disability Council (Councils for women and for youth have existed for a number of years).
- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Local Administration (MINALOC) have developed a Social Protection Policy and Strategy. People with disabilities are recognised as a priority group. A grant for people with disabilities is being considered for the future.
- There is a member of parliament for Disability.
- In 2005 Rwanda was selected as one of five pilot countries of the African Decade of People with Disabilities (ADPD) which is now active in 25 countries. The Rwanda National Decade Steering Committee (RNDSC) is responsible for advocating for mainstreaming of disability issues across government and for building the capacity of DPOs. The RNDSC was heavily involved in the creation of the 2007 and 2009 Ministerial Orders. In 2009, Rwanda agreed to be an Ambassador Country for the ADPD. The first step towards this was to produce a National Programme for Mainstreaming Disability. This was launched in February 2010. The official awarding of Ambassadorial Country Status took place in December 2011.
- The Ministry of Education has a division for Special Needs Education and is producing an SNE Policy. There is no SNE teacher-training curriculum although inclusion is taught. The Ministry of Education has been working with UNICEF to create 'Child Friendly Schools' although these focus on physical accessibility only.

### Civil Society:

- Civil society, through NUDOR, is now better able to communicate the priorities of its beneficiaries to government.
- National civil society organisations of people with disabilities represent all categories of disability – visual impairment, hearing impairment, mobility impairments, learning difficulties and mental health – as well as addressing cross cutting issues of HIV and AIDS, gender, literacy, access to information and participation in decision-making
- International civil society is increasingly active in Rwanda. Handicap International has been present in Rwanda since 1994 and currently focuses on Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Epilepsy, inclusive development, mental health and gender based and sexual violence. Other agencies including the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Swedish Association of Disability Organisations (SHIA), Disabled People's Organisations of Denmark (DPOD), Plan International and UNICEF are all engaged with disability issues.

## 6. Challenges

There are many challenges facing people with disabilities and their organisations. The movement is growing in strength but still lacks expertise, capacity and skills, and there is still little coordination and collaboration amongst the groups. There is still much to do in raising awareness amongst people with disabilities of their rights; helping groups to organise and advocate; sensitising the authorities especially at grass roots level of the needs, rights and abilities of people with disabilities; and in improving the quality of services. There is much progress to be made in improved access to education, poverty reduction and employment, health care, communication and independence.



VSO's contacts to date are largely through partners in Kigali and there is limited knowledge of what is happening in the rural areas although this will be helped through the introduction of volunteer District Disability Advisers.

## **7. Volunteering with the VSOR disability programme**

A volunteer working within the disability programme in Rwanda will find it rewarding given the exciting possibilities and opportunities ahead especially with the announcement of the National Disability Council. There are challenges as described above, however we maintain that this is an area in which VSO can continue to contribute greatly, particularly as disability is not high on the agenda of other development organisations, if at all. There are also significant moves to push disability further up the agenda, a much more promising level of political will and a feeling of optimism and enthusiasm.

### **Resources available**

There are some materials on disability and organisational development in the volunteer resource room at the country office. On the volunteer computer in the resource room there are also many capacity building tools and research carried out or found by volunteers. The programme manager also has resources / reports including copies of the Disability Law although these are also available online. A recent documentary has been made on sign language and positive terminology for disability in Kinyarwanda which can be borrowed from the programme manager or programme support officer.

### **Funding available for the programme**

Sadly not a lot of external funding for the programme any more but we are always looking. In the disability programme volunteers and their partners can apply for small amounts of funding from the budget we have for placement support grants. These can be used to help volunteers carry out activities which help them meet their placement objectives. Please speak to the programme manager about how to apply for these funds and what type of activities the grant can support.

### **Disability working group (DWG)**

The DWG meets on the third Friday each month from 12 to 3pm. We have lunch from 12 to 1pm giving an opportunity for volunteers to share stories, air frustrations etc. From 1 to 2pm we have a round table, sharing experiences, resources, problems, successes and there is opportunity from 2 to 3 for outside speakers or specific themes. Lunch is provided and transport costs are covered (but accommodation is not).

### **Current volunteers (as at July 2012)**

- District disability advisers at Nyanza and Ngororero Districts – supporting the district to mainstream disability across all areas and also supporting local groups to be more active and to work more effectively with the district
- Sign language trainer at RNUD – supporting the organisation to develop, promote, raise awareness and train in Kinyarwanda sign language
- Teaching methodology adviser at Butare Centre of the Deaf – supporting teachers in various areas of methodology and sign language
- Community outreach adviser with RUB – supporting local branches of RUB to be more economically independent and sustainable and promoting economic opportunities for individual members
- Deaf movement adviser at RNUD – helping RNUD to better understand and carry out its role, including in areas of governance and communication in particular
- Special educational needs adviser – supporting VSO education volunteers to build capacity in inclusive education and developing strategic direction for VSO Rwanda
- Disability and inclusion adviser at Rwanda Aid – supporting schools and centres in the far south-west of the country



- Research and advocacy adviser with NOUSPR – developing research and advocacy skills in the area of mental health
- Disability movement capacity builder with NUDOR – developing the capacity of this new umbrella organisation to support its member organisations
- Management and fundraising coach with NPC – further developing the organisational capacity of NPC to take sports to people with disabilities at grassroots level and to use sport as a tool to raise awareness and address social isolation and stigma
- Organisational development coach with UPHLS – supporting the organisation to manage its growth particularly its growing human resources and links with donors
- Management adviser at RWNAD – enabling the RwandaAid office to be independent to of the UK head office.

**We also hope to welcome in 2012 and early 2013:**

- Audiologist to provide training on basic techniques for hearing tests, advisory role with colleagues on consultations, research into a system of hearing test provision
- Speech therapist to support the new speech therapy service at the Rwanda Military Hospital
- Advocacy adviser for NUDOR – increasing the capacity of NUDOR to advocate at high level of government on behalf of its members
- An adviser for the Deaf Women's Movement – to support deaf women to identify and address their own needs
- Organisational development coach for NOUSR – enabling NOUSPR to build on its earlier research
- A further District Disability adviser for Musanze District

Sarah Challoner, Disability Programme Manager (June 2012)