

Uganda Association for the Mentally Handicapped / Inclusion Uganda



Best Practices in the Employment of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities: A Case Study of Uganda

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**Best Practices in the Employment of Persons with
Intellectual Disabilities: A Case Study of Uganda,
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1. Executive Summary

This case study report examines the barriers faced by persons with intellectual disabilities in accessing employment in Uganda. The study employed qualitative methods of data collection with mainly 3 target groups: employers from the formal and informal sector, persons with Intellectual disabilities and their Parents/ guardians. The methods of data collection included: interviews and focus group discussions. A total of 80 participants were involved in the study, with 25 employers, 25 persons with intellectual disabilities and 30 parents and/or guardians.

The report includes an introduction and background; a literature review looking at the international and national policy landscape, and research related to the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities; a summary of the research findings; recommendations for different stakeholders, and finally a conclusion.

The report found that that the major barriers preventing persons with intellectual disabilities from finding inclusive employment are a lack of education, social stigma, safety concerns and discrimination. The perspectives from this report can be used as a guide to taking steps to increase the employment of persons with intellectual disabilities in Uganda.



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2. Introduction

Employment in Uganda is life, but why are people with disabilities not given equal opportunities to compete favourably in the job market? 12.4% of Ugandans live with disabilities, yet only a small fraction live independently because most of them lack financial stability. What can we do as Ugandans to address this challenge?

This study focuses on 4 questions:

- How compliant are the national employment policies to the provisions of the UN CRPD on employment of persons with disabilities regardless of the nature of a disability?
- What are the attitudes of employers toward employing persons with intellectual disabilities in their organization/company?
- What are the attitudes of parents/caregivers toward employability of their sons/daughters with intellectual disabilities?
- What are the attitudes of individuals with intellectual disabilities towards employment?

2.1 Background

Uganda is an African country located in the eastern region with the current population of approximately forty-eight million people based on world meter elaboration of the latest United Nations data. The Uganda bureau of statistics census report (UBOS 2016) indicated that 12.4% of the Ugandan population lives with disability, implying that approximately 4.5 million are persons with disabilities. The National Policy on Disability (2006) defines disability as permanent and substantial function limitation of daily life activities caused by physical, intellectual, mental or sensory impairment and environmental barriers resulting in limited participations.

Persons with intellectual disabilities in Uganda are vulnerable due to their impairment, negative society attitude, neglect, discrimination, ignorance, lack of awareness and superstitions. As a result, persons with intellectual disabilities don't obtain basic life skills, are not taken to school, are not given job opportunities, have limited access to information and are even not well represented at the community level.



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The Uganda constitution 1995 recognizes the rights of persons with disabilities and provides the basis for the enactment of laws and development of policies that address their concerns. The constitution provides for fair representation of marginalized groups on all constitutional and other bodies, recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities to respect and human dignity. However, the country faces a significant challenge in implementing effective and efficient disability services and policies due to a significant implementation gap.

Even though Uganda's economy is growing, a significant size of the population is not benefiting optimally from this growth. In fact, the vast majority of Ugandans remain employed in low productivity activities, including persons with intellectual disability. In both urban and rural areas, a large number of people work in the informal sector which faces limited access to capital, limited support and recognition by authorities which prevents them from maximizing potential and full inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities in the employment sector. There is therefore a need to check on the current status of employability of persons with intellectual disabilities in Uganda.



3. Literature Review

3.1 International Policies on Employment

The United National Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD)

The Ugandan government signed the UN CRPD in March 2007 and ratified it in September 2008. In fulfilment of the Convention, the National Council for Disability (NCD) created awareness on the UN CRPD, translated it into two local languages so that the local council could easily understand it and also equipped the local authorities with skills relating to the convention to practical needs of people with disabilities in the general community. As a result, some of the district local governments formulated district ordinances for implementing the UN CRPD in their districts.

Despite the few districts that were domesticating the UN CRPD, the majority of the districts had not taken up this role mainly due to lack of understanding of the benefits of practicing the Convention on their respective district levels. The NDC and other DPOs therefor need to explain the UN CRPD and show the benefits of implementing the Convention, such as the contribution of persons with intellectual disabilities to the economic growth of the district through addressing their right to employment as stipulated in Article 27 of the UN CRPD. Article 27 of the UN CRPD requires State Parties to recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work on an equal basis with others.

The UN CRPD was put under the Disability Act in line with Articles 32 and 35 of the Uganda Constitution. The rights in this Act have however not been put into programs for persons with disabilities. This has therefor left gaps that require advocacy and networking to promote the disability rights in Uganda.

The Act vested authority in Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development to enforce the Act. It requires the minister to determine the percentage of employment quotas for persons with disabilities in consultation with employment.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals have been accepted by Uganda and the government has agreed to implement the 2030 SDG agenda. Uganda has to base its development agenda on the SDGs like the rest of the world. As a nation, Uganda established a national framework for implementation and achievement of these goals. In 2016, a report was published by the government showing that the SDGs are already integrated within the second National



Development Plan (NDP II) and has also embraced the principles of the sustainable development goals into the Uganda Vision 2040 (Habaasa, 2019). The economies of countries grow when more workers have access to jobs and are more productive. The Sustainable Development Goal number 8 aims “to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all” (United Nations, 2016).

Goal targets 8.5 and 8.8 talk about full inclusion of persons with disabilities and equal pay for work of equal value and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers. This indicates that persons with intellectual disabilities have a right to equal pay with all other employees doing the same work.

Uganda developed its 2015/16-2019/20 national development plan in line with the SDGs. About 76% of the SDGs targets are reflected and integrated into the plan into the plan of various local governments (OPM 2017). The national standard indicator (NSI) framework was put in place by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics Indicator in collaboration with other ministries, departments and Agencies (MDA’s) to finalize the alignment process by reviewing a mapping of the SDG targets and matching them to NSI indicators (OPM 2018).

Although there is an initiative to implement goal 8 in Uganda, there are still limitations in the implementation process due to a number of challenges such as weak implementation planning, coordination gaps, data and reporting inadequacies, weak private/ public partnerships and limited financial resources.

Overall, Uganda has been successful in aligning SDGs in the national policy, but this alignment is yet to be reflected in integration at the budgetary, local government and at project implementation levels (National Planning Authority, 2016).

3.2 National Policies on Employment

The National Employment Policy for Uganda (2011)

The National Employment Policy for Uganda (2011) recognizes that the employment of vulnerable groups including people with intellectual disabilities which is important for both wealth creation and poverty eradication. Other relevant legislation includes the 2007 Equal Opportunities Act, the 2006 Employment Act, the 2000 Worker’s Compensation Act and the 2008 Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTJET) Act, as well as provisions for quotas and tax incentives under the Persons with Disabilities Act.



The Disability Act (2006)

The UN CRPD was put under the Disability Act in line with Articles 32 and 35 of the Uganda Constitution. This Disability Act was aimed at stopping discrimination against persons with disabilities. The rights in this Act have however not been included into programs for persons with disabilities (Nyombi & Kibandama, 2017). This has therefore left gaps that require advocacy and networking to promote disability rights in Uganda. The Act gave authority to the Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development to enforce the Act. The minister is required to determine the percentage of employment quotas for persons with disabilities, in consultation with employment stakeholders. Section 17 of the Act entitles an employer who has over 5% of their total labour force with disabilities to tax exemptions. Employers are entitled to a tax refund of 2% of all payable taxes, a figure too low to entice them (Nyombi & Kibandama, 2014). Uganda has enacted progressive and forward thinking about the UN CRPD but it faces a significant challenge in implementing effective and efficient disability services and policies due to a significant implementation gap.

3.3 Studies on Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Uganda

A case study on disability employment in Uganda by Anyango (2019) identified a range of factors including poor employer attitudes towards employing persons with disabilities, high levels of discrimination in the employment sector, a lack of required skills and qualifications among persons with disabilities seeking work, inaccessible workplaces, and a lack of information about employment, despite the existence of legal and institutional frameworks on the employment of persons with disabilities.

A report from Inclusion Works (Institute of Development Studies, 2020) found that employers say that they are open to employing persons with disabilities, yet they are reluctant to apply affirmative policies, despite the lack of applicants with disabilities. Other barriers to employment identified included physical and informational inaccessibility of workplaces, the perceived cost of employing people with disabilities, low expectations of persons with disabilities, stigmatization, low levels of education, and lack of reasonable accommodation provision.

Both studies were carried out on the employability of persons with disabilities in general, therefore more research with a focus on the employability of persons with intellectual disabilities is needed.



3.4 Challenges Faced by Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

A study by Yeo (2001) indicated that many persons with disabilities in Uganda are poor because they do not have access to education and skill training programs as it is considered “a waste of time”. Those who are taken to school are often ignored by teachers as they are considered to slow down the teaching-learning process. The study also revealed that the employment policy is not clear on how employers should work with persons with intellectual disabilities. Participants urged that persons with intellectual disabilities are vulnerable and lack good support to enable them to advocate for their right to work and employment. There is therefore a need to determine the current barriers to employability for persons with intellectual disabilities.



4. Methodology and Results

4.1 Methodology

The study employed qualitative methods of data collection. To find out the employability of persons with intellectual disabilities in mainly 3 target groups: employers both formal and informal sector, self-advocates and Parents/ guardians. The methods of data collection included: interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussions (See Appendix I for interview questions). A total of 80 participants were involved in the study, with 25 employers (20 from the informal sector and 5 from the formal sector), 25 self-advocates and 30 parents and guardians.

4.2 Perspectives of Employers

In general, employers said they rarely consider employing persons with intellectual disabilities and this was worse in the formal sector. In addition, the employers would at least consider employing persons with physical impairment as compared to those with intellectual, psychosocial disability. The employers listed the following reasons for their views, though most of the reasons cut across both in the formal and informal sector.

Employment in the formal sector

Employers in the formal sector generally lacked knowledge of intellectual disability. They did not have enough information on the capabilities of persons with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities. Therefore, they thought that persons with intellectual disabilities lack the necessary qualifications, knowledge, skills, and expertise and experience needed for the available jobs. Furthermore, they thought that persons with intellectual disabilities have far lower levels of education than people without disabilities. This inhibits the employability of individuals with intellectual disabilities, especially where job-specific knowledge requiring formal education is required.

Secondly, the employers in the formal sector considered persons with intellectual disabilities to be less productive than people without disabilities, and hence entailing higher labour costs. The employers were not ready to incur the costs which may arise from providing reasonable accommodation. They believed it is more costly to hire individuals with disabilities because accommodations or other investments may be necessary to achieve the same level of productivity as people without disabilities.



Employment in the informal sector

Employers in the informal sector held negative stereotypes towards persons with intellectual disabilities, including concerns they are dependent, non-competitive, at times violent, with poor interpersonal skills, helpless and hypersensitive.

Employers also have concerns that customers (consumers) will react negatively to employees with intellectual disabilities. In addition, they fear that co-workers may fear the negative effect of increase in their workloads as a result of working with an individual with intellectual disability. Individuals without disabilities also have a wrong perception that some disabilities are contagious and that they are all have poor hygiene.

4.3 Perspectives of Parents

Most parents and guardians who participated in the research said they would like persons with intellectual disabilities to be employed but identified the following barriers to employability of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Parents in urban settings

Parents in urban settings whose children have gained skills said they do not have enough capital to promote their children in the employment sector. They lack the funds to maximize output and market their children's abilities and businesses.

Parents in urban settings were also concerned with society having negative attitudes to their children and the lack of an accessible environment at the workplace. They explained that persons with intellectual disabilities do not get access to accessible information or assistive technologies, and they lack an accessible physical environment.

Parents in rural settings

Parents in rural settings said that schools have not been accommodating persons with intellectual disabilities despite the government's effort to enforce inclusive education. There are multiple barriers preventing persons with intellectual disabilities from accessing good education like a lack of tuition fees, means of transport to the school, wheelchairs, well



trained special needs teachers, accessible school buildings, visual and hearing aids, and speech therapists.

4.4 Perspectives of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

In urban settings

Most persons with intellectual disabilities in urban settings felt they were not skilled and qualified enough to compete in the available job market. They urge that school has not equipped them with the required skills that they think they would apply comfortably in the employment world. For example, Latifa (self-advocate) would like to be a chef but the school she attends doesn't have a cooking department, and her parents cannot afford to take her for private lessons.

Persons with intellectual disabilities in urban settings report that family members tend to make decisions for them, not giving them a chance to express their views about the kind of work and employment they would like. Some parents and guardians do not take their children to school and in addition do not look for any available opportunities and resources that are even freely provided by the government and other Organizations for Persons with Disabilities.

In rural settings

Persons with intellectual disabilities in rural settings said that society has a negative attitude towards them and views them as people who are helpless and are not capable of working independently just like the rest of the community. This has limited them from expressing themselves fully and utilizing their full potential. They said that they are constantly rejected by employers due to discrimination, which lowers their confidence and self-esteem, in turn preventing them from looking for other employment opportunities.

Persons with intellectual disabilities in rural settings argued that they are exploited in the workplace. They are given a lot of work and in turn they are given very little wages and some employers send them off at the end of the day promising to pay them in the near future, a promise they do not keep.



5. Recommendations

5.1 For Employers

- Employers should increase their understanding of intellectual disabilities and the potential of persons living with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities at large. A key place to start would be by engaging with organisations of persons with disabilities representing persons with intellectual disabilities.
- Employers also need to focus on creating more inclusive workplaces.

5.2 For Parents/guardians

- Parents need to support their children to acquire skills that will enable them to obtain jobs either from the formal or the informal sector.
- To build-up confidence and self-esteem in their children and also support them to be more independent and engage free in all family matters and the community at large.
- To look for employment opportunities for their children in which they are qualified.

5.3 For Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

- There is need for persons with intellectual disabilities to understand their rights as stated in the UN-CRPD
- Persons with intellectual disabilities need to be confidence in expressing their views, needs, strengths and weaknesses.

5.4 For Policy Makers

- There is need to generate statistical data from different regions of Uganda to determine the actual levels of employability of persons with Down syndrome and intellectual disabilities at large.



- There is also a need to involve government officials in the research to determine challenges in implementation of Uganda's employment policy and article 27 of the UN-CRPD.

6. Conclusions

Persons with intellectual disabilities in Uganda are more likely to be unemployed than their peers without disabilities, especially youths and women. Persons with intellectual disabilities tend to work in the informal sector rather than the formal sector. In most cases, they are discriminated against and exploited in work.

This is as a result of barriers including stigmatization, actual and perceived skills and education levels, low self-esteem and self-confidence, inaccessible transport; and having less human, social, physical, financial and natural capital than persons without disabilities.

Much more needs to be done to ensure that persons with intellectual disabilities are able to fulfil their right to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.



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Appendix I: Interview Questions

Interview question guide for parents/caregivers.

- 1) What is the age of your son/daughter?
- 2) What do you do for a living?
- 3) How many children do you have? Order of number for the son/daughter with intellectual disability?
- 4) Did you enrol your son/daughter for schooling when they were growing up?
- 5) If yes, how did you find the quality of education offered to your son/daughter?
- 6) Do you think the education offered where they went to school prepared your son/daughter for future employment opportunities?
- 7) Are you confident that your son/daughter have the right skill to secure a job in the job market?
- 8) If not so, why do you think so?
- 9) Would you wish that your son/daughter secures a job and earn a living? self-employment or wage employment, please explain your choice?
- 10) If yes, which job would you wish them to do?

If no, what are your reasons, please share

Interview question guide for persons with intellectual disability

Part A:

1. Do you have any job at the moment? If yes, what do you do?
2. If it is wage employment, are you paid same salary for job done like everyone else?
3. Do you love and enjoy your job? Please explain why?
4. Are you treated fairly at your place of work?
5. Do you have concerns that you may wish to be addressed going forth?



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Part B:

6. If it is self-employment, how did you begin your business?
7. Are you in service industry or product industry?
8. Where did you learn the skills that you are using to run your business?
9. Are there challenges being experienced associated with the nature of disability in running your business? Please share.

Part C:

10. If you don't have a job, which job would you wish to have, and why?
11. Would you wish to go into self-employment or wage employment, please explain your choice?
12. Have you ever tried looking for a job before?
13. What channels of information do you use to know about job opportunities?
14. Do you have any skills that will enable you to get the job that you want or have a business that you would prefer to run?
15. What challenges have you experienced so far in looking for employment opportunities?
16. What do you think should be done to improve employability status of persons with intellectual disability?

Interview question guides for employers.

1. Do you have anyone with a disability working in your organization?
2. If yes what is the nature of the disability?
3. Have you ever employed or considered employing a person with intellectual disability in your organization?
4. If not so, what are your reasons?



5. Do you feel that you might need some form of support to employ an individual with intellectual disability? Please describe the nature of support that you might require.
6. What are the basic minimal requirements would you require from an individual with intellectual disability to employ them in your organization?
7. The national legislation on employment provides some requirements for organizations in the employment of persons with any form of disability, what are the challenges being faced in actualizing this provision for your organization?

