Policy brief: Improving inclusion of disability in African regional policies

Key policy messages: Developing disability-inclusive policies

- Explicitly include people with disabilities and their organisations (DPOs) as integral actors in all stages of the policy-makings, including development and evaluation, thereby ensuring that their real needs and aspirations are met.
- Ensure that policies reflect the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
- Disability-inclusive policy must have allocated budgets, developed monitoring and evaluation frameworks and developed and tested information management systems.

Overview

The results presented here constitute an important component of a larger research project: Bridging the Gap: Examining Disability and Development in Four African Countries. The research programme is based at the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre, UCL, UK, funded by the Economic and Social Science Research Council (ESRC) and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID). Its overall objective is to analyse the “disability and development gap” - the apparent increasing disparity between disabled and non-disabled people in relation to multidimensional poverty, as a country’s social and economic development increases.

Inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of development is recognised as a key factor in ensuring successful development within a country or region (United Nations, 2015).

The African Union (AU) is the continental body that aims to promote social and economic development and integration, as well as eradicate poverty on the African continent by developing policies in all areas of governance to guide its 55 member states. It has taken 11 policy-related initiatives in relation to disability, which this research has critically analysed.

In order to gain a regional perspective on the extent to which mainstream social economic policies are genuinely disability inclusive, 11 key policy or strategy documents and continental plans of action from the African Union (AU) were reviewed and analysed. These were based on a predetermined selection criteria developed by the research team that identified important documents that have had a significant impact on development across the region. This analysis complements similar policy analyses undertaken through the Bridging the Gap project in four African countries: Zambia, Uganda, Kenya and Sierra Leone.
Results

The AU documents reviewed include two regarding education, three regarding health, one regarding employment and one regarding social protection in which persons with disabilities are included but not the sole focus. In addition, two disability-specific documents were reviewed, as well as two documents regarding general development issues. The documents were selected to critically analyse the potential impact of the UNCRPD (UN, 2006) on regional policy development and implementation in the four policy domains (education, health, employment, social protection) of our Bridging the Gap project. Policies published since 2010 were selected, thereby allowing sufficient time to elapse to ensure incorporation of the principles of the UNCRPD into AU policy. In addition, this analysis also demonstrates the impact of these policies and strategies upon the negotiation process of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The methodological foundation of the analysis is based on the health policy analysis model described by Walt and Gilson (1994) that reviews the content of the policy, the context and process of development and actors involved. The content of these policies are rated in terms of their inclusive mention of disabled people’s rights to health, education, labour markets and social protection, accessibility of these services, level of disability inclusion specified in implementation plans, enforcement mechanisms, budget and finance, and management information systems.

Policies were rates on a scale of 1 to 4, with high levels of inclusivity for people with disabilities rated as 4 and those with the least mention and least inclusivity rated as 1. In addition, a brief description was included about the context of the policy development, the actors involved in the development process, and the actual process of development (for example, who was consulted and how much non-tokenistic input and subsequent involvement took place).

All information analysed was based on a review of the existing documents. There is very limited information available on the context and process about how these policies/strategies were developed or the actors involved, but the limited evidence gathered suggests ineffective inclusion of DPOs as actors in the process.

Notably, not one of the policies reviewed achieved an overall rating of more than 1.8 out of 4 - the rating for a fully inclusive policy. This means that none of the policies reviewed are effectively addressing the range of needs of people with disabilities.

The commonalities across all four policy domains are:

1. No or narrow definitions of disability provided (i.e. with little recognition of the role that environment factors in disability);
2. Limited or no mention of disability-specific inclusion across all policy domains (ratings all below 3); and
3. The content element of rights of people with disabilities rated the highest overall for all policy domains (average rating of 2.1) suggests awareness of these rights but with limited follow through to other policy content elements (for example, accessibility, budget allocation, monitoring and information management systems).
These low ratings in part reflect the conflation of several different populations into a single ‘vulnerable groups’ category (i.e. women, youth, ethnic and minority groups, rural populations as well as people with disabilities), thereby obscuring the important differences between these marginalised groups. Needs of ‘vulnerable’ female headed household differ from marginalised youth and both are different from the disability-specific needs of someone who is blind or who live with an intellectual impairment.

Figure 1 presents the average low ratings across the four domains.

Several documents reviewed specifically address disability policy and practice. For example, the disability-specific Comprehensive Plan of Action for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities 2010-2019 (CPA) was published by the African Union in 2010 and written in close collaboration with the African Disability Alliance – a continental-wide umbrella organisation of DPOs. This important document reflects the articles of the UNCRPD highlighting the barriers faced by people with disabilities, including inadequate policies, funding, monitoring and evaluation and the need for data disaggregation by disability status. The Plan, however, does not present any disability-specific implementation strategies, mechanisms of enforcement or budgetary specifications, limiting the realisation of these goals.

Another important policy is The Common African Position (CAP) to the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Published by the African Union in January, 2014 it sets out a common continental African viewpoint for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and was drafted for the then ongoing negotiation process of the Sustainable Development Goals. This document was analysed using the same ratings system applied to the 4 domains. The reason for analysing this was to determine the extent to which disability is included in the critical domain of development. An average rating of 1.8 suggests that disability-inclusion has not been effectively integrated into this development agenda, despite the fact that this policy was drafted at the same time as the Sustainable Development Goals negotiations, with their strong inclusion of disability, were underway.
Key Messages

The following key messages arise from the summary analysis presented above:

**Key message 1: People with disabilities as key actors in mainstream policy development**
The involvement of DPOs as key actors from the start of any policy, strategy or implementation plan development is crucial to ensuring that the voices of people with disabilities are reflected in the intent and content of these documents. Only if this takes place will mainstream public policy and strategies be genuinely inclusive. Relegating disability issues to disability-specific policies and strategies contradicts inclusion.

**Key message 2: Use of consistent and clear definitions of disability**
The definition of disability must be clearly stated in all policy documents and should reflect the important role that environmental factors (e.g. physical, social, attitudinal, policy and legal barriers) play in disability. The UNCRPD provides a good working definition of people with disabilities while also recognizing that ‘disability’ is an evolving concept and culturally dependent.

**Key message 3: Explicit mention of identified disability-specific needs of people with disabilities**
The explicit mention of disability and the needs of people with disabilities is imperative if awareness of disability issues is to be raised and policy-makers and development practitioners provided with an understanding of how to realise these needs as well as how they can develop appropriate indicators to monitor and evaluate this implementation.

**Key message 4: Need for Disability-Inclusive Strategies in Policy Statements**
While inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream as well as disability-specific services is critical, it is also imperative that explicit implementation plans, budget allocations, monitoring and evaluation indicators, enforcement plans and disability-disaggregated data systems are developed.

**Bibliography**


Policies Reviewed


Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want. (2015)


Draft Declaration on Employment, Poverty Eradication and Inclusive Development in Africa. (2014)


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