

# International Day of Persons with Disabilities

3rd December 2009

## Empowering lives, reducing poverty

Today, December 3rd, is International Day of Persons with Disabilities: a worldwide celebration of the contributions and achievements of those living with disabilities and an opportunity to tackle some of the issues which continue to make life harder for them. With this year's theme as 'Making the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Inclusive: Empowerment of persons with disabilities and their communities around the world', the impetus is the need to address the undeniable relationship between chronic poverty and disability. Only through real empowerment can this connection be broken, enabling those with disabilities to live integrated, productive lives in which they have equal opportunities to participate socially and economically. Without this, there is little hope of achieving the aims of the MDGs and true poverty reduction will remain elusive.

Disability exists worldwide. In fact, there are an estimated 600 million disabled people living in the world today. But it is the people with disabilities in the developing world, about 80 per cent of the world figure, who suffer most as a result of their impairments. They are among the poorest of the poor, the least empowered, and the most in need. Within their societies, they are likely to be some of the most vulnerable and marginalized, often denied equal access to educational and employment opportunities.



Economically empowered: Even though he is blind, 54 year old Saidi is able to grow crops and contribute to his family's income following training in mobility and orientation from CCBRT.

view. Nearly half of these Tanzanians are children. It is estimated that households with a member who has a disability have a mean consumption less than 60 per cent of the average Tanzanian, a figure which reflects the fact that around 75 per cent of food production in this country is supplied by women but they are also the prime caregivers for family members with disabilities. The vicious circle of poverty is evident. These facts need to be confronted now, as we reach 2010 and have a mere five years remaining to fulfill the objectives of the MDGs.

live below the poverty line, according to the UN, what chance is there of meeting MDG1 to 'Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger'? If an estimated 98 per cent of children with disabilities in developing countries do not attend schools, how can MDG2 to 'Achieve universal primary education' be realised? As for MDG3, to 'Promote gender equality and empower women': what hope of ensuring that this is universal when women and girls with disabilities suffer more physical and mental abuse than those without disabilities? It is also known that people with disabilities are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS, and without addressing this issue it will be difficult to reach the disease reduction targets stated in MDG6.

Empowerment is pivotal in challenging the inequities faced by people with disabilities. But what exactly is empowerment? It is providing the means by which people can decide what they want and take the appropriate action to get it, thus facilitating independence in all areas of a person's life rather than making them rely on others. Specifically, empowerment is

best achieved through access to quality education, employment opportunities and social integration. In tandem with this, access to appropriate healthcare is vital if people with disabilities are to reach their full potential as members of society. This is, ultimately, the key to guaranteeing that the MDGs apply universally.

Today, we mark the lives of those who face unnecessary suffering as a result of their disability. What is more important are the tomorrows in which these issues must be tackled. With just five years remaining before the world will be judged on its success in achieving the MDGs, and seeing real reductions in worldwide poverty, death, disease and unequal access to education, now is the time to act.

People living with disabilities must become fully integrated, economically productive, members of their society. Only action and a commitment to change can demonstrate a commitment to the empowerment of people living with disabilities.



Around 1,000 people gathered in central Dar es Salaam to mark last year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities

In Tanzania itself, about 10 per cent of the population (or four million people) are believed to live with a disability, although the figures may be higher as disability is often hidden from public

Disability prevents people from accessing their basic human rights and what they need to be fulfilled, equal members of society. As long as 82 per cent of disabled people in developing countries

Join us today, 3rd December, at Mnazi Moja grounds in central Dar es Salaam to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities from 08.45 to 12.30pm. Invited guest of honour: His Excellency, President Jakaya Kikwete



## Empowerment and employment opportunities for all

Before she got her first full time job in April 2009, Suzanne Nyambela relied on her sister for money. Having never attended secondary school, the 24 year old, who has a mobility disability due to polio, used to earn her keep by running errands for her family but disliked the dependence she had on them. Seven months into her new job at Tarmal Industries in Dar es Salaam, Suzanne no longer needs to turn to others for financial support. She still lives with her sister, but can now afford food and transport. Her job has also given her a sense of purpose, direction and the motivation to work hard for a better future.

Placed in the company by Radar Development, the not for profit division of Radar Group Limited, whose primary aim is to find jobs for people with disabilities and HIV/AIDS, Suzanne has found renewed hope through her employment: "One day I would like to complete my education and use the experience I have gained here to open a small business," she says.



Suzanne Nyambela, who has a disability, enjoys her job at Tarmal Industries and the social integration that comes with it.

In April, Tarmal employed five women with disabilities as packers through Radar Development. Zain Barmel, the company Chief Executive believes that employing people with disabilities is an important aspect of corporate social responsibility and also brings its advantages. He says that people with disabilities tend to appreciate their jobs more and absenteeism is low. Whilst

some flexibility in the working day has been necessary to ensure that the employees with disabilities are able to access the transport they need to get to work, the business has not had to make any significant changes to accommodate the new staff.

Jonathan Sutton, Chief Executive of Radar Group Limited says, "People with disabilities make up a large proportion of the population and they can make an important contribution to Tanzania's economy. Employing someone with a disability makes business sense too because they have a unique appreciation of their job, are very committed and are willing to work hard in order to succeed."

Tarmal is not the only business to recruit in this way. Zantel has recently employed 18 people with disabilities as sales representatives through Radar, again providing opportunities for those who might otherwise be excluded from economic activity.

Employing a person with a disability is not just a positive step forward in terms of corporate social responsibility, a concept now embraced by many organisations, nor should it be perceived as 'doing a favour' for those with disabilities. In fact, although some workplace adaptations may be necessary in order to accommodate people with disabilities (such as appropriate access routes; toilet facilities; work stations), anecdotal evidence suggests that employees with disabilities bring with them specific commercial advantages.

For a person with a disability, an employment opportunity is likely to be viewed with greater appreciation, engendering a stronger sense of loyalty, commitment and motivation than would typically be demonstrated. In addition, employing those with disabilities is a crucial step towards increasing attention about the issues they face and strengthening public awareness of the difficulties experienced by this vulnerable group.

Vocational training to enhance employability is another means of empowering people with disabilities. This is the conviction driving Italian NGO CEFA, which runs a project called "LESS is more: Labour, Empowerment and Social Services for vulnerable people in Dar es Salaam", funded by the European Union. CEFA offers people with disabilities skills development courses in areas such as cooking and house-keeping and it runs a day care centre in Mbagala to give additional support to parents of children with disabilities. Fewer than two per cent of children with disabilities in the developing world will ever receive an education so, lacking the educational background of others, people with disabilities are supported by CEFA through courses which enhance their likelihood of securing future employment. In this way, the project improves opportunities for people with disabilities by developing a life skill: something which can be used to transform their day to day existence.



A recent trainee from a CEFA cooking course receives her graduation certificate

Photo: CEFA

CEFA has also established training on the job courses in carpentry and construction, in partnership with two private companies: "Domus" and Technocasa". This is an encouraging example of successful collaboration with the private sector, with companies directly involved in training people with disabilities.

Dario De Nicola, CEFA Country Representative believes the project is laying the foundations for long-term, positive changes. "In the last 6 months, through the LESS is more project, we have trained 27 people with a disability, providing them valuable skills that have increased their opportunities of employment. Before attending the courses, the chances for these people to access a regular monthly salary were low. Today things are changing and the goal of economic self-sustainability is not impossible anymore."

There are an estimated four million people in Tanzania living with disabilities and they are among the most impoverished and politically marginalized members of society: an estimated 20% of all people living on less than a US dollar a day have disabilities. Opportunities to rise above poverty are limited in many cases by the lack of legislation to improve their skills development and employment options. In organisations of over 50 employees, current legislation requires that two per cent of staff members should be a disabled person. But in reality few firms are aware of the law and fewer still implement it. Parliament is in the process of discussing an increase in this amount to five per cent, which would be a positive step towards recognizing the rights of people with disabilities, as well as the contribution that they can make towards the socio-economic development of Tanzania.

Employment, and equal access to income generating activities, leads not only to a person becoming a financially independent individual but also brings with it immense social and personal prospects. The chance to integrate fully as a member of the workforce brings those with disabilities into mainstream society, reducing discrimination, and proving their worth as individuals. Importantly, employment enhances self esteem, so the reality of empowerment extends beyond economics into social rehabilitation.

**Radar Development is a not-for-profit division of Radar Group Limited. Its aim is to find jobs for vulnerable people especially those living with disabilities and HIV/AIDS.**

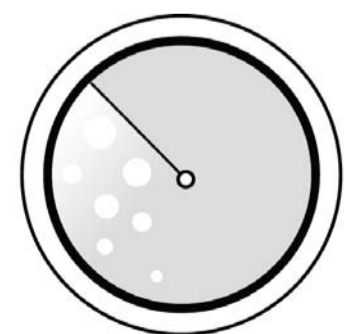
**Radar Development is based at CCBRT in Msasani. Interviews are conducted there on a walk-in basis on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings.**

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## People with disabilities excluded from HIV/AIDS services, says report

A report, published today by the Tanzanian Commission for AIDS (TACAIDS) and funded by the German BACKUP Initiative, implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH (German Technical Cooperation), illuminates what life must be like for the four million or so Tanzanians living with a disability.

Margaret Mkanga, member of Parliament, said that the report was commissioned to help understand the extent to which the HIV/AIDS epidemic was infecting - and affecting - those living with disabilities: an area about which to date little has been understood. The study, she said, had disproved many misconceptions about people living with a disability. "It is commonly and incorrectly - assumed that the disabled are not at high risk of HIV infection because they are unlikely to be sexually active or engaging in high-risk behaviours. In fact," said Ms Mkanga today, "this report indicates that these assumptions are far from true: that people with disabilities face all the known risk factors for HIV/AIDS (poverty, illiteracy, stigma and marginalisation), and are at equal or - increased risk - of HIV infection."

Key among the study's findings are that people with disabilities are sexually active and engaging in high-risk sexual activities, yet are less educated about HIV than their peers and more likely to be excluded from critical HIV services. They are also more likely to face sexual abuse.

"One particularly worrying aspect uncovered by the study team was the way that stigma and discrimination towards people living with disabilities prevents them from accessing basic health services," Ms Mkanga said. "Parents, caregivers and health staff often assume people with disabilities do not have sex, or disapprove of them being sexually active. This can result in caregivers refusing to escort them to clinics, health staff turning them away, or people with disabilities being missed during HIV outreach work."

The report paints a bleak picture of the obstacles and barriers that people with disabilities must overcome before being able to access critical health services like HIV testing. "On a basic level," Ms Mkanga said, "the disability itself may prevent people reaching the clinic. Those living with physical impairments, for example, may not have wheelchairs; those with visual and hearing impairments may not have an escort able to take them. Even if they can reach the clinic, the building itself may keep them out by having too many stairs or by not having ramps and wide entrances. The negative attitude of

some health staff is also reported to be a key barrier to people accessing services. When resources are stretched, health staff may consider that those living with disabilities are somehow less worthy of treatment than those who are not."

There are also difficulties in accessing information. "Many people with disabilities are excluded from formal education and are illiterate. Even if they overcome these two important hurdles, information is rarely circulated in formats that are accessible to them. For example, people with visual impairments need material in Braille, the intellectually challenged may need simpler or pictorial representations, and the deaf may need sign language interpretation. Access to information is a right of all Tanzania's citizens, and sexual health information that may save lives is critical. It is clear that if the HIV epidemic is to be halted and reversed in Tanzania, as the Government intends, we cannot exclude people with disabilities from HIV information and services."

The Government of Tanzania has outlined its commitment to reaching disabled people with HIV services in key national policy documents. Yet to date little has been done to actualise these commitments, and of the many hundred of HIV organisations currently working in Tanzania, few specifically target people with disabilities, or take into account their unique circumstances and needs.

The study published today was commissioned by TACAIDS. Its key recommendations include the need to overcome stigma and discrimination at the family, community and national levels; to build a disability-friendly environment and strengthen community support for people with disabilities; to strengthen the capacity of HIV and disability service providers; to improve data collection on disability; to strengthen the policy environment; and to work towards overcoming the many obstacles to health service access. Critical to the latter will be the need to ensure HIV information is available in formats which are appropriate to those with learning, visual and hearing difficulties.

A new programme, supported by the Governments of both Tanzania and America, and coordinated by Tanzania's disability organisation, CCBRT, and CBM, is already underway to implement the report's findings.

The report is available to view on TACAIDS's website and is entitled: *The Forgotten*.

### CCBRT, CBM and PEPFAR: Making HIV/AIDS services accessible and available to people with disabilities in Tanzania

People with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable to HIV/AIDS; yet they are often excluded from HIV/AIDS messages. For instance, people with visual impairments cannot read the awareness raising materials, those with hearing impairments cannot hear the radio announcements.

Until recently there was no co-ordinated approach in Tanzania to address this issue. But this year CCBRT, in partnership with CBM US, member association of one of the world's largest disability organisations, began a project funded by The US President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR). The aim of this project is to make HIV/AIDS services accessible to people with disabilities all over the country. Over the course of the three year project, the goal is to give 94,500 people with disabilities across 15 districts improved access to HIV/AIDS services.

So far the CCBRT team has visited all Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) to measure their knowledge on disability and HIV/AIDS and to ensure a co-ordinated response to ensuring accessibility. CCBRT also organised a stakeholders meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, DPOs, the University of Dar es Salaam, development partners, and the media to introduce the project. There has also been close collaboration with the Regional Medical Officer so that measures to improve access to HIV/AIDS services for people with disabilities are comprehensively introduced. CCBRT will take the lead in ensuring that most of the health facilities in Dar es Salaam are accessible to people living with disabilities and will train a number of HIV/AIDS counsellors in sign language, so they can offer HIV/AIDS counselling to people with hearing impairments.

Information, education and communication materials appropriate to people with different disabilities of varying ages are in the process of being developed. These include pictorial depictions of HIV/AIDS messages for those with learning difficulties and messages in Braille for the blind. Posters and flyers on prevention, care and treatment of HIV/AIDS are being distributed amongst communities in the five target districts with this information backed up a radio and television announcements. Baseline information has been gathered on order to clearly track the effects of the project over time.

By the end of 2009, 23,000 people with disabilities living in five districts are expected to have had access to HIV/AIDS messages that they were previously excluded from and this is an important step forward towards prevention of the pandemic and saving lives.

CCBRT will be offering free HIV/AIDS voluntary counselling and testing services at Mnazi Moja grounds on 3rd December as part of the event to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities.



# Preventing death and disability through improving mother and child healthcare

The theme of this year's International Day of Persons with Disabilities looks towards the empowerment of people with disabilities through making the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) more inclusive. The MDGs are a set of eight targets adopted by United Nations states including Tanzania that aim to stimulate development in the world's poorest countries. But with just a few years left to meet the MDGs, there are two which are far from being reached: MDG 4 to reduce child mortality and MDG 5: to improve maternal health.

Maternal and infant mortality rates in Tanzania remain high. Of the two and a quarter million women who give birth each year in Tanzania, around 13,000 die from pregnancy related causes and in childbirth. Another quarter of a million in different stages of pregnancy or childbirth suffer disabling conditions or impairments. Children are also vulnerable: 157,000 die before they reach the age of five, 45,000 being newborns with the main causes of death being asphyxia, preterm birth and infections. It is the quality of care during pregnancy and immediately afterwards which accounts for most causes of newborn deaths.

Four million Tanzanians, about half of which are children, live with disabilities and yet approximately 50% of these could have been prevented or remedied with good maternal care and early recognition and treatment of the condition. The human cost of poor maternal healthcare is evident, as families and communities bear the consequences of maternal death. Babies are particularly at risk: a motherless baby is more likely to die before it reaches the age of two years than a baby who is nursed by its mother.

Disability can have even more severe long term consequences. Children born with disabilities which remain undiagnosed and untreated will also, typically, experience social isolation, exclusion from mainstream education

and, consequently, a future restricted by a condition which might easily have been remedied had they received the appropriate care at birth or in infancy. Conditions such as cleft lip, cleft palate and clubfeet are best cured when a baby is young.

Fistula, a condition which can develop in women as a result of obstructed or protracted labour, is a clear example of how a lack of high-quality maternal services can result in years of needless suffering. Fistula renders women incontinent but can be remedied through surgery. Yet, without widespread awareness of the condition, and without the facilities to address it immediately after childbirth, it can result in a lifetime of debilitation and can even result in premature death.

HIV spreads not only through unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected partner, but can also spread from an infected mother to her unborn child and after delivery through breast milk. Without adequate maternal healthcare facilities, with integrated HIV/AIDS services, this transmission can occur unnecessarily and undetected.



The majority of maternal and infant deaths can be prevented through improved maternity services

Whilst the human cost of living with a disability is demonstrable, the



The Government of Tanzania and CCBRT have entered into a public-private partnership to build a new maternity hospital for Dar es Salaam

economic and developmental cost is often underestimated. Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General, stated that: "When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life." In rural Africa, women are responsible for transporting two-thirds of all goods moved, and evidence shows that the value of women's unpaid house and farm work is equivalent to one third of the global Gross National product. Moreover, income generated by women tends to be directed towards food, education, medicine and other family needs. It is usually women who make a direct investment in the wellbeing of their families.

This is another compelling reason to take action to address the quality of maternal healthcare services in Tanzania and to ensure that prevention and intervention are the watchwords when addressing disability issues in Tanzania. This approach is backed by CCBRT, Tanzania's largest provider of surgical and rehabilitation services for people with disabilities. Erwin Telemans, the chief executive officer of CCBRT recently stated: "Most causes of disability are related to the quality of health service delivery. So it is extremely important to improve maternal and newborn healthcare in Tanzania in order to lower the number of deaths and disabilities occurring

during pregnancy and childbirth. And where disabilities do occur, it is vital to seek early treatment to reduce the effect of that impairment on a person's life."

A commitment to improving maternal health services in Tanzania is evidenced by the recent public-private partnership between CCBRT and the Government of Tanzania, who together are commencing the construction of a new maternity hospital in Dar es Salaam, in mid 2010. The mandate for the Baobab Maternity hospital is clear: to provide high quality health services so that increasing numbers of women and children survive without impairment. The new hospital will provide services for normal and emergency deliveries thus preventing maternal and infant deaths, disease and disabilities.

The hospital will also offer essential family health education and comprehensive HIV/AIDS services. The European Commission has recently endorsed this initiative and has committed three billion Tanzanian shillings to the first phase of the hospital's establishment.

The challenge now is to drastically reduce the number of maternal and child deaths in Tanzania, to prevent disability and to ensure that those born with impairments are quickly treated.

## Statement from Her Excellency Anne Barrington, Ireland's Ambassador to Tanzania

The Embassy of Ireland is delighted to take this opportunity to mark International Day of Persons with Disabilities and raise awareness of disability issues. We are privileged to be in a position to support CCBRT in their tremendous efforts to improve the lives of Tanzanian children and adults with disabilities.

CCBRT has demonstrated that through commitment and with innovative approaches to disability, we can address many issues, even for very vulnerable communities. Through partnership with grass roots organisations, CCBRT has reached out to families across Tanzania, even in some of the most remote and most disadvantaged areas. We have seen the remarkable impact of their work on the

lives of families, for example, where women suffering from fistula for many years have been repaired and been empowered to make a full and valuable social and economic contribution to their communities.

The plan to build the maternity hospital under a public private partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare is an excellent example of commitment to sustainable development in the health sector. Here civil society, the Government of Tanzania and development partners are all playing a vital role. Such concerted and coordinated efforts are essential for us to increase disability care in Tanzania and to improve access to quality services, particularly in rural health facilities. Through partnership we can also improve the availability of basic emergency obstetric care and ensure that more women will be able to deliver their babies safely in Tanzania without risk of death or long term disability.