

Africa Disability Protocol leaves no one behind

FOR Patience Kanguma, having a society where people with disabilities are included in all sectors, and live together in acceptance without fear of discrimination, is a dream that is attainable.

Ms Kanguma's focus on disability rights comes from her close relatives and friends who live with a disability.

She has witnessed their challenges, especially the discrimination they face on a daily basis, and this motivates her to champion disability rights.

Similarly, Lucy Bwalya's dream is to see parents and guardians embrace children with disabilities.

She believes that inclusion starts at home.

Her passion for disability rights stems from her experience in raising her nephew, who was born without cerebral palsy after suffering from severe yellow fever at the age six months.

Ms Bwalya says this stimulated her to further her studies in special education.

Both women work for Cheshire Homes Society of Zambia (CHSZ) in the Make Way programme, an intersectional approach to improve access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for vulnerable young people in Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda.

The role of CHSZ project is to advocate for SRHR policies and programming, including the African Disability

Protocol (ADP), and to establish safe spaces



By MOSES CHIMFWEMBE

at health facilities for young people with disabilities.

Ms Kanguma, who is Make Way project manager at CHSZ, has implored the New Dawn government to prioritise signing and ratifying the African Disability Protocol (ADP) as Zambia strives to adhere to the principle of the Vision 2030 and sustainable development goals of leaving no one behind.

The ADP is tailored to the African context and upholds the rights of persons with disabilities from an African viewpoint.

It addresses unique and contextualised challenges and incorporates detailed issues such as customs, traditional beliefs, harmful practices and the role of the family, caregivers and

community.

The protocol also deals with community-based rehabilitation and minority groups within the African disability community, including people with albinism.

However, since the ADP was adopted by all 55 member states of the African Union in Banjul in 2018, only Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Mali and Rwanda have ratified it while the rest of the countries are yet to do so.

"The Government of Zambia needs to maintain its position in the international community as a country that respects human rights and the dignity of its citizens including those of persons with disabilities. As Zambia adheres to the principle of leaving no one behind, it is essential that the

Government also signs and ratifies the African Disability Protocol," Ms Kanguma explains.

As of now, attitudes towards people with disabilities in Zambia are negative; they face stigma and discrimination in their communities and their work places.

Many public and private infrastructures are not physically accessible, and information is not available in appropriate formats such as braille, large print or sign language interpretation which causes people with disabilities to miss out on important information.

For young persons with disabilities, the situation is particularly



• PARTICIPANTS of the public dialogue forum for the signing and ratification of the Africa Disability Protocol pose for a photograph. The forum was organised by the Zambia Federation of Disability Organizations under the Make Way programme recently. Picture courtesy of Cheshire Homes Society of Zambia.

challenging as there is lack of inclusive schools, inaccessible recreational facilities, lack of access to SRH services and commodities, negative and judgmental attitudes from service providers, and stigma and discrimination from their families and communities.

Ms Kanguma also noted that Zambian laws and policies are not harmonised with the standards of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Persons with Disabilities Act.

She says, "Zambia is

still using archaic laws that were being used in the colonial era and most Zambian policies and laws are not inclusive to persons with disabilities. Some are even discriminatory towards people with disabilities."

"All operations and programming in the government are guided by policy. So, if the policies are negative and not inclusive of the minorities, it means the target populations will be left out."

Ms Kanguma further explains that policy advocacy is the key to addressing exclusion at all levels in society.

Since September

2021, CHSZ, with technical support from the Netherlands-based Liliane Foundation, has been mobilising programme partners and organisations of persons with disabilities to develop a policy brief to justify the need to have the ADP signed and ratified.

With this policy brief as a basis, the organisation and partners have undertaken several advocacy efforts with government line ministries, mainstream and social media, and civil society organisations including organisations of (young) people with disabilities.

Ms Bwalya is the CHSZ communications officer and she explains how the consortium has been working with various media organisations in Zambia in this process.

"The media play a vital role in keeping everyone updated on various processes and advocacy efforts undertaken by CHSZ and partners. With help of the media, we raised awareness on the need to have the ADP signed and ratified by the Government of Zambia."

"We informed stakeholders and the public about the importance of and our

advocacy for the ADP. Media attention helped to further our cause, and to make the public aware."

The regional advocacy campaign to ratify the ADP, launched in November 2022 by the African Union and Sight Savers, may provide an extra push to this extraordinary advocacy effort at national level.

Therefore, the two champions from CHSZ will undoubtedly remain in the forefront to raise their voice for the underprivileged in society.

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• PARTICIPANTS during the launch of information service aimed at tackling climate change and supporting sustainable agricultural practices in Kasenegwa District in Eastern Province.

International Crops Research Institute out to provide farmers with climate information

By DORCAS KABUYA
AS the world faces the consequences of climate change, the urgency to take action has never been greater. Amidst this crisis, farmers, organisations and government are taking steps to mitigate and adapt to these changes, with the view of securing a sustainable future for generations to come.

In order to aid farmers access to climate information, the International

Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) working with its partners has launched a new initiative dubbed the Munda Make Over Television and Climate Information Services radio programmes.

The programmes were launched under the Accelerating Impacts of CGIAR Climate Research for Africa, (AICCRA) project in Kasenengwa District of Eastern Province.

These programmes are designed to provide farmers with accurate and timely information about the climate and its impact, in order to help them adapt to the

changing environment. ICRISAT Researcher, Amos Ngwira said that the launch of the agricultural learning programmes was a milestone in the fight against climate change.

Dr. Ngwira stated the Eastern Province and many other parts of Africa experienced low yields as compared to other continents of the world.

He added that climate change and variability provided an opportunity to improve productivity and the increase the resilience of the agricultural system.

"Good yield is dependent upon three factors. Soil, crop management and climate change. But currently, climate

change and variability is posing a challenge to farmers in terms of how they produce their crops and the yields that are realised," he stated.

Dr. Ngwira observed that packaging climate information in the right format was one way of dealing with the effects of climate change and increasing farmers' resilience to manage the risks by taking advantage of opportunities that exist in the seasons such as weather information.

"Sometimes the way weather information is packaged and delivered to farmers", it does not provide an opportunity for them to make informed decisions about what to plant. Therefore, as AICCRA we came up with a

way of packaging that information to help farmers about farm management through radio and television programmes," he explained.

The goal of these programmes is to help farmers understand the impact of climate change and improve decision making in adaptation.

And Chitetezo Cooperative Federation chairperson, Ester Zulu, noted that the organisation was committed to supplementing government's efforts by ensuring that rural communities participate in pushing its agenda for a green economy.

Ms. Zulu hinted that the support from AICCRA and

mentorship from Community Markets for Conservation (COMACO) had contributed to building a safer and more protected environment that would sustain the needs of farmers despite the advent of climate change.

"As a federation, we have learnt how to do farming following the rules of nature through compost manuring, crop rotation, minimum tillage and agroforestry using the rich nitrogen fixing tree known as Gliricidia Sepium. This has led to an increase in our yields and improved soil fertility," she disclosed.

In giving a vote of thanks, Chief Chanje of the Chewa speaking people who is also

care taker of Chikwe Chiefdom was grateful for the initiative adding that local language programmes in improving agricultural production in rural areas considering the educational level of most farmers.

"With the help of the media, the educational local language programmes are disseminated to a wider audience as most rural farmers consider radio an important tool and can be an effective in behavioural change," Chief Chanje conveyed.

Speaking at the same function, Senior Irrigation Engineer, Bernard Chungu, who spoke on behalf of the Eastern Province Agricultural Coordinator pointed out

that radio programmes will help farmers access vital climate information.

The launch of the climate information services is a significant step in the fight against climate change. The service will provide farmers with accurate and timely information about the climate and its impact, helping them to make informed decisions about their farming business.

Indeed, drama is an effective tool for communicating sustainable information that can be used to drive an important point and cause behavioural change on any issue affecting society climate change inclusive.-NAIS