



## DASU Newsletter

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Institutional Feedback Training Enhances Disabled People Organisation's Advocacy Skills	2
Motivating Stories: NUOD's president motivates PWDs by sharing her life story	2
AIFO-Liberia Represented at 2019 World Leprosy Day Event in Italy	2
Country Director's message	6
Editorial: human rights-based approach to disability is all encompassing	6
Persons with Disabilities Trained to become Trainers in Inclusive Business Skills	7

## DISABILITY RIGHTS ADVOCATE URGES STRONGER GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP

Disability Rights Activist and Former Malawian Minister of Disability, Rachel Kachaje has called for a stronger relationship between persons with disabilities and the government to address countless challenges encountered by persons with disabilities in Liberia. She made the remarks at a disability seminar hosted by the National Union of Organisations of the Disabled in collaboration with AIFO-Liberia, with technical assistance from the Alliance on Disability. As a panelist during the seminar, Kachaje said the government is the main stakeholder of the disabled community, and, as such, it should be involved in the development of policies, programs and projects intended to give hope to persons with various forms of disabilities. *"people with disabilities need someone to encourage them, so they can stand on their own and fight for their rights, because disability issues are about human rights. Government must mainstream disability issues in all aspects of development and the citizens must help to stop discrimination, she noted.* The focus of the seminar was on shifting the attention of the Liberian political class, key actors at local and nat'l level on the importance of the human rights-based model for disability

**Rachel Kachaje  
Presents at NUOD  
Disability Seminar  
Held at Corina  
Hotel**



## INSTITUTIONAL FEEDBACK TRAINING ENHANCES DISABLED PEOPLE ORGANISATION'S ADVOCACY SKILLS

The essence of the institutional feedback meeting was to improve the knowledge of DPOs members advocacy, communication, and management skills and to effectively carry out their organisational activities as well as affect policy making processes in line with the UNCRPD and in support of persons living with disabilities in Liberia. In January, 2019 a total of 10 DPOs across Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Monterrado counties conducted three days feedback meetings. An abridged training manual containing 11 lessons was summarised and distributed to the 10 DPOs ahead of the meetings with their members. Trainings were facilitated by representatives of DPOs that attended the first institutional training that was held in Ganta. Topics were focused on the UNCRPD, the Liberia National Action Plan on Disability (NAP-D), Advocacy and Communication strategies, Networking at local and nat'l level, legislation on Disability in Liberia among others. At the end of the meetings, the DPOs concluded with the setting up of committees to regularly engage local actors on matters relating to persons with disabilities. Committee is also tasked with the responsibility of creating awareness in schools and other community gatherings.



Grand Gedeh Disabled Organisation IT Feedback Meeting

## AIFO-LIBERIA REPRESENTED AT 2019 WORLD LEPROSY EVENT IN ITALY

On the occasion marking the 66th World Day of Leprosy patients which is celebrated on the last weekend of January, AIFO-Liberia Country Director, Silvia Poggioli represented the institution at the itinerary tour held in Italy. During this event, thousands of volunteers gathered to witness the commitment of the Italian Association Friends of Raoul Follereau. The day was initiated in 1954 by French Journalist Raoul Follereau as a way to

## MOTIVATING STORIES: NUOD'S PRESIDENT MOTIVATES PWDs BY SHARING HER LIFE STORY

While the Emancipatory Disability Research aims to highlight main barriers faced by people living with disabilities in Liberia, it also seeks to motivate other persons who have been traumatised as a result of their condition. At the second thematic meeting which was focused on **Physical Disability and Leprosy** held at the Youth Center in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, on February 15, the president of the National Union of the Disabled, Naomi Harris shared her life story and experiences. She explained her initial difficulties during childhood. She talked about her family where her mother was a native woman and her father had five women, though only two lived in his house.

*"My foster mother was legally married to my father and she had authority over his property because she was his first wife. I was born part of twins, Roland and Naomi."* When she was 2 years old, she was ill and after a lot of difficulty was diagnosed with polio. She took different treatment including five different operations. *"My elder sister took care of me and taught me to use crutches. When I was 12, she accompanied me to the mission school and talked to*

*the school principal for my admission."*

After the initial difficulties, Naomi made an effort to do different activities. In 1980, they shifted to Grand Bassa county where she became involved in singing and then, leader of the school's choir. After graduating from high school, she moved to Monrovia because of the war.

*"I was on my own with a friend who was a disabled person as well. We started to do things together. We went to tailoring school together and then later attended the teacher's college and obtained a C certificate and went back and got an associate degree in administration"*. Later she was introduced to the Association of Disabled Female Int'l, an association of disabled women, its Executive Director, Ricardia Dennis and her husband Robert Dennis. She started working with them as the health coordinator. She participated in several trainings but was still shy. Then, in 2009 the organisation sent her for a one month int'l training course on conflict resolution. This gave her an understanding of disability issues beyond the context of Liberia. Other trainings and participation in decision making made her stronger. *"At ADFI, I learned of the UNCRPD and what it means to me. As you*



Naomi Harris President of NUOD Narrates Her Story

*are aware, most disabilities begin from the home and because of this my mother used to cherish my brother more than me because she felt that nothing good could come out of me. From there, I decided to join NUOD and today I'm the president. I think that the main barrier I faced was acceptance. It was not an easy thing to be accepted but I'm grateful to where I am today that I can go out and speak about disability"*.

raise global awareness and call attention to the fact that the Leprosy Disease can be prevented, treated, and cured. Public and outreach events were held to give people information about how AIFO works alongside communities across Africa, Asia and Latin America to prevent the spread of the disease. The event was also held to gather support for its elimination around the world. Silvia used the occasion to explain about AIFO's

support for Leprosy elimination in Liberia and the expansion of the DASU project which also includes health aspects, human rights, income generating activities and civil society empowerment. The theme for this year's celebration was *ending discrimination, prejudice and stigma*. It is a glaring fact that the majority of people affected by Leprosy continues to face extreme stigma and marginalisation and the need to

include them in society cannot be underestimated.

# PICTORIAL REVIEW

EDR 2nd theme Meeting on Physical Disability & Leprosy Held at the Catholic Pastoral Compound in Bong County



Inclusive Business TOT Workshop for Heads of DPOs Held at the Catholic Pastoral Compound in Bong County



# OF MAJOR ACTIVITIES



DASU Project Local Monitoring Team Pose for photo with Grand Gedeh County Development Superintendent



Silvia Poggioli Presents on AIFO-Liberia at the GML Event Held in Italy



Nimba Disabled Community Celebrates Int'l Day of Disability in Saclepea, Nimba County



Bishop Boah Welcomes Participants at the Pastoral Center as Chiara and Francesca Look on



LNAD IT Feedback Meeting

Grand Gedeh Disabled Community IT Feedback Meeting



DASU Communication Program Preliminary Meeting with Media Managers



Monitoring Visits to Grand Gedeh County

G-77 Nimba County Branch Pose for photo after IT Feedback Meeting



## COUNTRY DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

As we successfully enter year 2 of the DASU project, we are taking the time to reflect on the past year and look to what is ahead. While year one set the basis for our project intervention, it was also a year of success evident by the numerous impacts the project has had so far. From building the institutional capacity of DPOs to providing hands on training for our beneficiaries, the project continues to make impacts on the lives of persons with disabilities. We couldn't do our work with the people who devote their time and energy behind the scenes, like our community workers, technical staff as well as our support staff, our partners (NUOD, NCD, DISEI, and RIDS) and AIFO HQ staff. This is to say that the first year of the project was outstanding and we have all of you to thank for it.

We've got great plans in the works for the second year and encourage you to keep in touch through our various platforms. At AIFO-Liberia, we continue to find new ways to serve for the improvement of people with disabilities in Liberia. AIFO-Liberia has simultaneously adjusted to the challenge of maintaining high quality, affordable programming in the face of rapid cost resulting from the economy and donor fatigue. Our main focus on year 2 is sustainability of our actions and I look forward to continuously report on the impact this project is having on the lives of persons with disabilities. We thank you for your support!



**Silvia Poggioli**  
Country Director  
AIFO Liberia

## EDITORIAL: HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DISABILITY IS ALL ENCOMPASSING

**By: Staff Writer: Luther S. Mendin**

Human rights based approach to disability in Liberia has an established history on the existence of fundamental rights, but goes beyond simply mentioning those rights in laws or policy documents. For example, right to live, right to assemble are all fundamental human rights. However, human rights approach to disability is about the empowerment of the whole person. Unlike approaches or society that view disability as a medical condition, human rights approach views disability as a "normal" condition and suggests

that disabling practices or experiences exist only when society or environment fail to include them in all aspects of the social life. Human-rights based approach contends that people living with disabilities, like any other persons enjoy all forms of human rights. Therefore, the state must create concrete actions to create environments which promote the inclusion of people with disabilities to be welcomed and enabled to live as full and active citizens. Human rights based approach also empowers people with disabilities to look at themselves as rights holders, and places them as active beneficiaries of rights. One way in which people with disabilities can

## PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES TRAINED TO BECOME TRAINERS IN INCLUSIVE BUSINESS SKILLS

As part of the DASU project, a weeklong residential training on inclusive business was held for a total of 38 members of Disabled People Organisations in Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Montserrado counties. The training was held in Gbarnga, Bong county in February 2019. The overarching goal of the DASU project is to improve the economic and financial autonomy of people with disabilities through inclusive and social business skills for sustainable livelihoods. During the feasibility study for the DASU project, it emerged clearly that financial autonomy was one of the main issues experienced by persons with disabilities. It is expected that at least 120 persons with disabilities will be empowered through grants and loans during the course of the DASU project, following presentation, evaluation and selection of different business plans that will be submitted by the project's beneficiaries. Facilitators of the training came from the Department of Economics of the University of Florence in Italy (DISEI),

also a partner to the DASU project. Chiari Chimirri, one of the facilitators of the training said she is impressed by the works AIFO-Liberia is doing for persons with disabilities in Liberia. She said the participants of the training were motivated to receive skills in inclusive business development. *"The training was a training of trainer's workshop to prepare the participants to multiply the knowledge to their colleagues who did not have the opportunity to attend. The impression is positive, some of them already have some business knowledge and tools and some are new to this idea. But if they find an environment that is welcoming, that is warm and understand that disability is not a problem to solve but a situation to cope with, then of course they will have a good result, she noted.* Two of the participants, Morgana M. May-Cole and Emary A. Jessie lauded AIFO-Liberia for the initiative and termed the effort as a great step towards improving the lives of persons with disabilities in Liberia. The next phase will be provision of loans/grants to selected DPOs.

become active participants in the development process is by exercising and enforcing their rights. Providing means by which persons with disabilities can actively seek redress when their rights are abused is one way in which services that are based on human rights principles can enable people with disabilities to fully participate. The utilization of human-rights based approach can enable people with disabilities to be transformed from passive recipients of services into active participants. Liberia signed and ratified the UNCRPD in 2012, however excluding the optional protocol. By ratifying the UNCRPD, Liberia bound itself to the treaty and assumed the responsibility that its obligations under the treaty are respected. Ratification of the UNCRPD was, therefore, a significant step in confirming Liberia's commitment to the principles and obligations set out in the treaty, including the general principles underlying the

rights-based approach expressed in the convention. In particular, ratification demonstrates Liberia's commitment to the right of people with disabilities to live independently, access opportunities and be included in the community life. Said so, it is an unfortunate truth that the history of disabled persons in Liberia is largely one of exclusion and marginalization. Persons with disabilities have too often been excluded from the job sector, denied access to opportunities, including access to funding, subjected to stereotyping among many others. This historical disadvantage has to a great extent been shaped by the notion that disability is a curse. As a result, persons with disabilities have not been respected on several fronts. Adopting a human rights-based approach to people with disabilities in Liberia has transformative potential for Liberia's growth. Drawing on these sources, we propose that the principles of participation and independence are essential for PWDs.



Emary A. Jessie-Bong Co.

**Emary Jessie** acquired his disability at age 6 while growing up in Monrovia. Throughout his childhood, he was discriminated against but this did not deter him from moving forward. Later on, his mother took him to the late **K. Derrick Jones**, a visually impaired man who became the first to learn braille in Liberia. With Mr. Jones, Emary learned braille in less than 3 months. He got his bachelors degree in **Public Administration** with emphasis in **Education** from Cuttington University. Emary was eventually included in the DASU project and currently serves as volunteer on the Emancipatory Disability Research. Emary feels that the DASU project has exposed him a lot and made him an integral part of the disability movement in Liberia. *“Through AIFO, I have sufficient knowledge on the CRPD. AIFO exposed me to the various counties and has allowed people with disabilities to have lot of respect for me. Through AIFO, I can educate people about business because of the training I attended. Being disabled doesnt mean you are finish; you can still contribute to society”, he noted.*

## COMING UP IN OUR NEXT ISSUE!!

- Highlights of Startup Activities
- DASU Communication Program engagements
- Beneficiaries Success Stories and more...



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# DASU PROJECT PARTNER DETAILS

**AIFO-Liberia: (Implementing Agency)** AIFO-Liberia is a professional non-profit health and development organization that enables opportunities for persons affected by leprosy, persons with disabilities, women, children and members of poor and vulnerable groups, through focused healthcare, education and economic empowerment initiatives in Liberia with the aim of providing a better quality of life and creating large scale positive change.  
<https://aifoliberia.org/>

**NUOD:(Local Partner)** The National Union of Organizations for the Disabled(NUOD) is the “Umbrella” federation of all Disabled People Organizations(DPOs) in Liberia. The Union was founded and formally registered with Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 28 October 1995 as a non-for-profit corporation act of Liberia, 1977. NUOD promote and advocate for the protection and social inclusion of all persons with disabilities in Liberia. <https://www.facebook.com/NationalUnionOfOrganizationsOfTheDisabled/>

**NCD:(Affiliate Entity)** The National Commission on Disabilities is an independent entity that was established by an act of legislation in 2005. The commission oversees all issues related to disabilities on behalf of the government of Liberia.

**RIDS:** RIDS stands for the Italian Network on Disability and Development. It is a network formed in Italy to promote the issues related to disability and the world over. <https://www.facebook.com/RIDSnetwork.org/>

**DISEI:** School of Economics and Management(DISEI), University of Florence in Italy. DISEI supports the economic activity of the DASU project through training and research. <https://www.disei.uniupo.it/>



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