Persons with Disabilities in Rwanda

According to the Fourth Rwanda Population and Housing Census (2012) there are 446,453 persons living with disabilities in Rwanda, of a total population of 10,515,973. This equates to just under 5% of the population over the age of 5. The total number of people with disabilities is likely to be higher; the World Health Organisation estimates that approximately 15% of any population will have a disability.

However, despite strong political will and a robust legal framework, there are challenges in terms of technical implementation. Persons with disabilities in Rwanda are less educated, less likely to be employed and more likely to be living in poverty than people without a disability. NUDOR has identified the biggest issues that persons with disabilities face is access to education, health and poverty reduction and has consequently decided to focus on these areas.

Education

The number of primary age children attending school is far lower for children with disabilities (68%) than for children without disabilities (89%). There is a lack of specialist schools, and mainstream schools do not always provide the necessary accommodation for children with disabilities which leads to high drop-out rates. There remains a lack of awareness about rights which means some parents of children with disabilities do not enrol their children in school. Women with disabilities face double barriers when trying to access education such as inaccessible sanitation facilities. Literacy rates amongst persons with disability in Rwanda are much lower than for persons without a disability: 50% of persons with a disability are able to read, compared to 72% of people without disabilities. Despite this, there are few education programmes for adults with disabilities.

Health

Poor health can be both a cause and a consequence of living with a disability. Whilst 85% of persons with disabilities in Rwanda have some form of health insurance, many assistive devices such as orthosis, prosthesis, white canes, hearing aids and certain types of psychiatric medicine are not offered. Furthermore specialist services such as audiology and speech and language therapy are not covered nor readily available. Rehabilitation services, which could help people to participate fully in society, are limited. There are also many barriers to general healthcare, including services such as sexual and reproductive healthcare, for example physical accessibility and communication barriers.

Poverty Reduction

People living in poverty are more likely to develop a disability and people with disabilities are more likely to struggle to make the income they need. The number of persons with disabilities engaged in economic activities in Rwanda is 56%; this is much lower than that of the population without a disability (75%). The reasons for low economic activity are, in part, linked to issues of access to education. Additional barriers to employment include stigma and discrimination and a lack of accommodations to make workplaces accessible / inclusive. Public works programmes offered through VUP are often not accessible to persons with disabilities.