

## **The problem we want to address.**

When we hear about sports, people think of competitive sport events, of fighting, winning and losing, of trophies and medals. yet sports can bring people together. It creates unity, develops physical and mental health, and it provides platform to showcase talents and extra ordinary abilities.

Uganda was the first African country that participated in the Paralympic games in 1972. This demonstrates that the country has recognized the needs for equal participation in sports. Yet over 2500 children and youth with disabilities still face Societal stigma and exclusion of sports activities, specifically in Northern Uganda.

They are excluded from participating in physical literacy such as games that involves a child to throw or role a ball, catch an object, run or use of a wheel chair, jump and hope and in general participate in adaptive sports activities.

Physical literacy means motivation, physical competence and capability, knowledge and understanding of the values of sports. It includes taking responsibility for engagement in physical activities which benefit the healthy development of the whole person. Lack of physical activities has contributed to their low self esteem, low self confidence, efficacy and risk of poor physical and mental health; dignity, education and social well being in our community.

“East Africa especially” Uganda has the highest population of People with Disabilities with 16% (PWDs). “Compared to Tanzania of 13.3% and Kenya of 15%” “According to the Uganda population census of 2012” 10 million people have one form of disability. Those with physical disabilities account for the highest proportion of impairment at 34%. They are followed by those with visually-impairments at 22% and hearing impairments at 15%. however we don’t see people with disabilities perform in regular activities.

Due to systematic discrimination, children and youth with disabilities are denied access to services and opportunities that could have developed and empowered them to gain dignity in their communities. Children and youth with disabilities are experiencing poor health conditions as a result of limited program designs. This is due to lack of effective delivery of a public healthcare programs for people with different types of impairments. Poor health is caused by systematic discrimination which created barriers as stated by World Health Organization (WHO).

The World Health Organisation further states:“Factors in a person’s environment that, through their absence or presence, limit functioning and create disability. These include aspects such as:

- a physical environment that is not accessible,
- lack of relevant assistive technology (assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices),
- negative attitudes of people towards disability,
- services, systems and policies that are either nonexistent or that hinder the involvement of all people with a health condition in all areas of life.”

Children and youth with Disabilities in Uganda still face Social barriers and this is related to the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, learn, work and age additionally, social determinants of health plays an important role.

This has contributed to the slow development of disability sports compared to mainstream sports in Uganda. Children with disabilities are four times more likely to experience violence than children without disabilities, barriers hinder these children to equally participate in day-to-day activities.

Attitudinal barriers are the most contributor to other barriers. For example, people may not be aware of the difficulties in how to access a place can limit a person with a disability from participating in everyday life. Examples of attitudinal barriers include:

- Stereotypes: Due to stereotypes, people have no belief in the abilities of persons with disabilities. Often disability is seen as a sickness which justifies the exclusion of any sports activities.
  - Stigma, prejudice, and discrimination: Within society, these attitudes may come from people's ideas related to disability. People may see disability as a personal tragedy, as something that needs to be cured or prevented, as a punishment for wrongdoing, or as an indication of the lack of ability to behave as expected in society.

The level of participation and physical activeness of children and youth with disabilities in Northern Uganda is being affected by a number of critical conditions as shown below.

### **Key Issue 1: Stigma of Disability in Uganda**

The Stigma of disability within Northern Ugandan society still exists in the region that suffered from 20 years civil war and these exist at the individual/family, community, sport system level because of superstitious beliefs, culture, Negative attitude and fear of curses and bad lucks.

### **Key Issue 2: Lack of Access due to individual, programmatic and structural barriers.**

Disability friendly Sports, talent development, empowerment and adventure sports such as hiking, boating etc opportunities are still lacking in our communities. There are few adaptive sport programs, recreational centers. Due to lack of advocates, specialized equipment, facilities and trained coaches/trainers,

### **Key Issue 3: Attitude associated with participation of girls in sport**

There is an overall negative attitude and lack of acceptance towards girls with and without disabilities participating in sports. This is due to our patriarchal culture that sees girls as second class citizens, a culture with clear gender roles. Everything that deals with activeness is meant for boys, not for girls.

### **Key Issue 4: Poor systems and infrastructure**

Although linked to lack of access, a developed sport infrastructure for people with disabilities is lacking. Special equipment's such as goal balls, showdown, wheelchairs for basketball, racing wheelchairs, and ramps in buildings are not available.

### **Key Issues 5: Lack of Special needs teachers and adaptive coaches.**

There is a gap of skills and knowledge of engaging the people with disabilities in building capacities of game and sports. Teachers and coaches in schools and communities do not include the disabled in sports and other co-curriculum activities

### **Beneficiaries**

Our beneficiaries are children and youth with disabilities (Physical, blind, deaf and intellectual disability) in Northern Uganda. The focus group are teachers, parents, government ministries, coaches and the community.

Here a success story of one of our beneficiaries:

Acayo Brenda is an eight years old girl with cerebral Palsy who uses a wheelchair. In school she faced discrimination from her peers. Due to lack of awareness, her teachers didn't know about adaptive sports, she was not included in any form of physical activities. In 2017, when we introduced our physical literacy programs at her school, she got the great opportunity to explore her ability on various sports activities, games and leisure time activities. Before, she had low self esteem to actively participate in physical literacy which test the child's ability to throw, use the wheelchair, jump, run, catch and kick a ball. Due to over protection of her parents she became very dependent on her family. But as soon as we started to involve her in physical literacy, she gained self esteem. And after two months only, she had developed her muscle and now she is able operate her wheelchair without any support from anyone. This made her much more independent

### **What has been done**

Many incredible organizations like National Union for disabled people of Uganda, Uganda Paralympic committee and individuals have been working hard at building the capacity of the disability sport system in Uganda. All persons with disabilities have the opportunity to participate in sport and recreation, at whatever level they desire whether grassroots or elite. However physical literacy is not promoted in schools and community physical activities due to lack of adaptive sports for daily activities and leisure.

A developed adaptive games in public in Uganda would help to reduce the stigma. for example wheelchair basketball, draws peoples attention to watch and cheer. wheelchair racing excite audiences, and engage others to participate. By allowing non-disabled to get involved, stigma or disinterest will be reduced.

A number of projects like the kids league Uganda, have been implemented to empower children and youth without disabilities in Uganda. But we still have gaps in adaptive skills development. Lack of specialised teachers, coaches and community workers, no inclusive sports festivals, no physical literacy activities in schools and development of creative arts, music, dance and drama, hinder the general awareness of capabilities of persons with disabilities.