

By John B. Thawite

At least 13.2% of Uganda's population of 45 million, aged two and above, live with some form of disability. The state minister for disability affairs, Hellen Grace Asamo, in a statement ahead of International Day of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), said nearly seven million Ugandans are disabled; a figure much higher than those living with HIV, estimated at 1.5 million. "The National Household Population Census Report (UBOS 2024) indicated that disability prevalence in Uganda stands at 13.6%, representing approximately 6.9 million persons with disabilities."

These statistics are critical as Uganda joins the rest of the world today to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities at Uganda National Institute of Teachers Education in Mubende district.

She said this demographic of PWDs is capable of making significant contributions as workers, innovators, parents, leaders and entrepreneurs.

"However, many continue to face barriers, including stigma, discrimination, inaccessibility, limited education and employment opportunities, and inadequate access to financial services," she says in the statement accessed by *New Vision*.

This year's national event is being held

13.2% UGANDANS LIVE WITH DISABILITY - UBOS

PHOTO BY JOHN THAWITE



Children with disabilities enjoying their right to education in Kasese district

forward to better serve persons with disabilities.

When the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) government took power in 1986, the situation of PWDs was in such a state that statistics about them were scarce. It wasn't, until the 1991 and 2002 censuses that disability questions were included, although exact numbers of PWDs cannot be accurately determined.

CAUSES OF DISABILITIES

A recent Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD)

AFFIRMATIVE PROCUREMENT SCHEME

A Procurement Reservation Scheme has been established under Uganda's Public Procurement and Disposal Authority (PPDA), under which at least 15% of government procurement opportunities is reserved for registered associations of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) alongside women and youth groups. This policy includes provisions to reduce participation barriers, such as waiving tender fees, relaxing eligibility criteria and replacing cash tender guarantees with declaration forms.

This initiative aims to economically empower PWDs by providing them with equitable access to government contracts and fostering their inclusion in national development efforts.

beneficiaries (5857 male and 5877 female) in 40 districts, with Luwero, Mukono and Wakiso districts, as well as Mukono municipality, each bagging an average of sh421,713,994.

PWDs IN THE PARISH DEVELOPMENT MODEL

As part of its wealth creation schemes, government has deliberately reserved and allocated 10% of the PDM funds for PWDs.

EMYOOGA PROGRAMME

The programme also includes PWDs on a special

centres that started in FY2021/22 and have so far enrolled 2,235 are Jinja Sheltered Workshop (69), Ruti in Mbarara (558), Kireka (344), Lweza (272), both in Wakiso, Mpumudde in Jinja (302) and Ocoko in Arua (490).

These centres train youth in various vocational skills, including carpentry, metal fabrication, food science and cosmetology.

The ministry says it is in the process of restructuring the courses to support the emerging market needs and skills expectations from youth with disabilities.

FIRST-EVER PRO-PWDs TECHNOLOGY

To enhance co-ordination in delivering rehabilitation services to PWDs, the ministry has developed the first-ever National Rehabilitation and Assistive Technology Strategic Plan (2025-2030).

This plan aims to strengthen rehabilitation services and promote functional independence for persons with disabilities.

CHILDREN SURGICAL SERVICES

Surgical services for children with disabling conditions have been expanded beyond

event is being held under the theme, *Wealth Creation Programmes: A Key To Socio-Economic Empowerment Of Persons With Disabilities*.

Alex Ndeezi, the PWD legislator for central region, says: "Although Uganda continues to be recognised globally as a model in promoting and protecting the rights of citizens living with disabilities," PWDs should use the day "to reflect on our achievements".

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), there were about 650 million PWDs globally (about 10% of the world population in 1993), which has since skyrocketed to around 1.3 billion or about 16%. This high increase signals the need for interventions aimed at uplifting PWDs.

The day serves to promote equality and full participation of PWDs in social and developmental activities and for government and stakeholders to reflect on past achievements, identify challenges and chart a way

forward (MoGLSD) survey notes that among children aged 5-17, around 19% of disabilities stem from congenital causes and about 10% from malaria. For adults, preventable causes, such as home accidents (7%) and road-traffic accidents (4%) remain significant.

The ministry adds that poverty and disability are deeply interconnected, with disability both contributing to and resulting from poverty by restricting livelihood opportunities.

GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS

Against this background and aware that wealth creation programmes can greatly reduce these risks and create an enabling environment for sustainable household incomes, government has invested heavily in several programmes that target PWDs with opportunities.

These include the National Special Grant for Persons with Disabilities (NSG), the 10% ring-fenced allocation under Parish Development

Model programme and Emyooga, among others.

SH43B UNDER NSG

Since the fiscal year 2019/2020, the NRM Government has been providing the NSG to PWDs to reduce poverty by promoting income generation and improving livelihoods.

This programme's primary objective is to enhance the well-being of PWDs through sustainable livelihood and income-generating activities that contribute to national development.

Through the MoGLSD, government has so far disbursed nearly sh43b directly to support 8,868 projects benefitting 65,784 individuals comprising 32,699 males and 33,085 females in 181 local governments.

Both the number of projects funded and the number of beneficiaries have steadily increased over the years, reflecting her strong commitment to uplifting the PWDs.

"However, the demand for the grant remains significantly higher than the available resources," observes this year's gender ministry's IDPD concept note.

A ministry monitoring report also shows positive outcomes in the economic and social welfare of PWDs in the targeted local governments.

Beneficiaries have reportedly successfully formed village savings and loan associations and engaged in various agricultural activities, such as piggery, bull fattening, poultry rearing, goat farming and produce trade.

"Additionally, others have developed skills in the service sector, managing income-generating projects including knitting and tailoring, salon businesses and restaurant management," adds the ministry document.

In central region alone, government has disbursed sh8,979,806,132 to 1,844 groups comprising 11,734

includes PWDs as a special beneficiary category within its skills-based initiative, though the uptake remains low at just 4%.

This low participation rate calls for targeted efforts to enhance engagement of PWDs in these programmes to fully realise their intended benefits.

ACCESS TO NSSF AT 40 YEARS

As a measure to broaden access to funds, National Social Security Fund has a criterion that allows PWDs access to benefits at 40 years under the Mid-term Access Bill, unlike other people at 45.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION TRAINING CENTRES

An additional opportunity is skills capacity building under the gender ministry-led vocational rehabilitation and training programme, which equips PWDs with employable skills every year.

According to the ministry's department of disability and elderly, the current operational rehabilitation

includes PWDs as a special beneficiary category within its skills-based initiative, though the uptake remains low at just 4%. Mulago National Referral Hospital to include Jinja and Mbarara regional referral hospitals, in addition to existing services at CURE Hospital in Mbale.

The Government, through an inter-ministerial committee chaired by the gender ministry, has finalised the design of a Severe Child Disability Assistance Programme aimed at addressing the unique challenges faced by children with severe disabilities requiring full-time care.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The Government is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol, having ratified both instruments to eliminate discrimination and exclusion of PWDs.

This convention guarantees PWDs access to information, justice, education, health services, employment opportunities and social protection.