

Developing women with disabilities' empowerment through income-generating activities – Burundi

Organization: UPHB (Union des Personnes Handicapées du Burundi)

Background

According to the 2008 census in Burundi:

- There are 287,046 persons with disabilities in Burundi
- 52.5% of persons with disabilities in Burundi are women
- The vast majority (93.5%) of these people come from rural areas
- The majority of services are located in urban areas and are therefore not accessible to most persons with disabilities¹.

According to the Demographic Health Survey from 2016:

- 36% of women aged 15-49 years have experienced physical violence
- 23% have suffered sexual violence.

There are no data available on women and girls with disabilities².



Noella Ndayikeza, Project officer

Originally a non-profit established in 1989, UPHB morphed into a collective of 38 DPOs from provinces across the country in 2012. Its mission is to protect and promote the rights of persons with disabilities in Burundi by raising awareness in communities about their situations and capabilities. UPHB works in partnership with international non-governmental organizations, public administrations and local organizations. The organization is a pioneer in the promotion and defense of the rights of persons with disabilities in Burundi. It also has advocated for the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

What happened?

The practice's objectives are to eliminate the violence, exploitation and abuse faced by women and girls with disabilities while also empowering them to counterbalance their exposure to vulnerability. This project, implemented in the municipalities of Bujumbura City, Gitega province, Ngozi, and the Muramvya province, has been active since 2013.

The activities focus on promoting the economic, social, cultural, sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls with disabilities. Training sessions are held on several important issues:

- **Employment and economic opportunities:** includes training on entrepreneurship (including management and development), methods for accessing credit and saving systems (including microfinance options), income-generating activities for women with disabilities, and training in innovative sectors in the ICT fields including the maintenance

¹ *Recensement général de la population et de l'habitat du Burundi 2008, vol.3 :13 Situation socio-économique des personnes vivant avec handicaps au Burundi*

² *Burundi Demographic Health Survey 2016-2017*

of mobile phones and household appliances, as well as in hairdressing, cleaning and sewing.

- **Sexual and reproductive health:** includes training for women, girls and young people in general about related risks (HIV, AIDS, and STIs), preventing GBV and contributing to empowerment through knowledge.
- **Conflict management and human rights:** includes the promotion of rights by presenting the legal frameworks governing the rights of persons with disabilities internationally and in Burundi. In collaboration with DPOs, UPHB identifies practice participants and includes them in the training.

The income-generating activities targeted a total of 37 women and girls. UPHB also provides training in innovative sectors in the ICT fields including the maintenance of mobile phones and household appliances, as well as in hairdressing, cleaning and sewing. As such, UPHB promotes the leadership and economic independence of women and girls with disabilities. These activities contribute to preventing GBV since poverty is one of the contributing and risk factors leading to GBV.

There are 20 instructors who host the different training sessions, two moderators and several organization members have been trained to support their peers. The instructors are women with disabilities, who were trained during the activities. There is knowledge sharing between the women with disabilities and other individuals in the community and the information is passed on efficiently which makes the practice sustainable.

What changed?

Employment and economic opportunities and the related income-generating activities targeted 37 women and girls. These activities contribute to preventing GBV since poverty is one of the contributing and risk factors leading to GBV.

The income-generating activities resulted in various positive outcomes for women and girls with disabilities including:

- Developing their economic empowerment.
- Shifting their personal and societal relationships: Husbands of women with disabilities react positively to the increase in household income, which can decrease the risk of GBV.
- Enabling them to purchase mobility equipment, which can make it easier to engage in economic and social activities.
- Helping them participate in local markets as vendors.

The practice contributes to fighting economic and social vulnerability, which are contributing factors to the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) experienced by women and girls with disabilities. Reducing their economic dependence increases their agency and power in their households, potentially allowing them to distance themselves from the perpetrators of SGBV. The activities also respond to women with disabilities' urgent need for autonomy and freedom.

Notable Successes

1. Offered 124 women and girls access to training on microfinance institutions.
2. Provided resources to support 227 women with disabilities who started their own activity.

3. Women with disabilities have improved self-esteem, which they explained was because they felt more valuable and more entitled to a place in the community.
4. Women with disabilities are more aware of their rights and have more resources to defend themselves against stigma and discrimination.
5. Women with disabilities were able to develop a network and support system with other women with disabilities and mothers of children with disabilities. For the mothers of children with disabilities, participating in these activities significantly reduces their exposure to discrimination by association, which is when an individual (typically a parent or a caretaker) is discriminated against because of their connection to a person with a disability.
6. There was more awareness of discrimination and stigma toward women with disabilities thanks to the training sessions on legislative frameworks. The training sessions on legislative frameworks raised awareness and led to changes in behavior towards women with disabilities and persons with disabilities in general among the community.
7. UPHB itself has also shown signs of improvement in terms of the leadership of women and girls with disabilities. Since 2016, the organization has been run by a woman with disabilities while 40% of the executive committee are women with disabilities. Female leadership increased because of the practice and some women with disabilities have been elected to savings and credit systems management committees at local level.

Key Success Factors

1. **The involvement of a range of actors** from UPHB, local organizations and other DPOs in the country is one of the success factors because of each organization's influence. Disseminating information to numerous different types of actors is an effective way of targeting large numbers of individuals, to achieve long-term change.
2. **Focusing on women and girls with disabilities** in the activities was another important reason for the success of the activities. This helped to effect changes in the way they are perceived by the communities. It ultimately helped to counteract their exclusion from the community. It also led to more leadership opportunities for women with disabilities.
3. **The active participation** of women with disabilities demonstrates that they believed in UPHB's objective and trusted in the effectiveness of the activities proposed.