



Ngativawanisei Mukana

INCLUSIVE TIMES

"Be Part of the Community"

Welcome to Inclusive Communities Newsletter

WHO ARE WE?, YOU MAY ASK

We are REPSI, (Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative). We are a renowned pan African organisation that is supporting governments and non-governmental organisations to provide holistic psychosocial care and support to children and their families in East and Southern Africa for 20 years now.

Our programs are spread across 13 countries and aim to enhance the psychosocial and mental wellbeing of girls, boys, youth their families and communities to be able to respond to challenges such as HIV and AIDS, conflict, poverty, climate change, environmental disasters and social strife. We also take advantage of opportunities such as education, health services, Sexual and Reproductive health to integrate psychosocial support (PSS). We deliver our programs through partnerships with regional bodies such as SADC (Southern Africa Development Cooperation), EAC (East African Community), AU (African Union) national governments and non-governmental organisations. In Zimbabwe, REPSI is registered with the Government as a Private Voluntary Organization (PVO 10/12).

REPSI enjoys a memorandum of understanding with SADC and has supported the SADC secretariat to develop and roll out a PSS Conceptual Framework and a Minimum Package of Services for Orphans and Vulnerable Children and Youth for the Southern Africa region. A similar process was also undertaken for the East African Community Secretariat. REPSI has supported national governments in all the countries where we have presence, to recognise and appreciate the need to plan and integrate psychosocial support interventions into their national action plans and policy initiatives. As a result of our policy influencing work, psychosocial programming has become a regular agenda item on the planning process in these countries and we have also seen an increase in the level of awareness and recognition of the benefits of psychosocial programs on children and families. Knowledge management is an integral part of REPSI's program approach. To this end, REPSI has over the years applied our lived experience and practice in the field of child care and support to develop locally relevant curriculum and training material.

As a result, REPSI has over the years been recognised as a leading provider of technical assistance in the MHPSS field. Our materials have been widely used globally in HIV and AIDS work, disability inclusion, post conflict programming and support to orphans and vulnerable children.

This Newsletter seeks to amplify the voices that are calling for disability inclusion. We are inviting partners and government department that wish to contribute to the next edition to freely reach out.

Enjoy our third edition!!!

Manicaland Organizations of Persons with Disabilities resolve to Learn AND Share

Stephen Ephraim

Organisations for People with Disabilities (OPDs) in Manicaland Province have resolved to learn and share amongst themselves than running the show as competitors. This resolution came out recently at a meeting which was held at Plan International boardroom in Mutare.

The meeting was coordinated by the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSI), a non-profit organization which supports the psycho well-being of children. REPSI is running a program named Inclusive Communities Project (ICP).

In Manicaland, OPDs which are participating in the ICP project include Tariro Foundation Zimbabwe, Freedom for Disabled

People Zimbabwe (FDPZ), Zimbabwe Youth for

Quadriplegic and Paraplegic Association of Zimbabwe (QUAPAZ) and Chimanimani Disabled People Association.

In his opening remarks, the REPSI Project Coordinator for Inclusive Communities Project Mr Clever Ndanga urged organizations not to work in isolation but share and learn from others.

"The purpose of this meeting is to open dialogue on Organizations for Persons with Disabilities to share information and ideas and then move as one team.

This collaboration should go to the extent of sharing information on issues such as how OPDs can get resources," said Mr Ndanga.

In order to get to know each other better, the OPDs presented their areas and scope of operations.

The OPDs resolved to form a consortium for the OPDs in Manicaland and prioritise issues such as cross learning and facilitate exchange visits. The OPDs suggested that a tour of Chimanimani was going to be the first.



Arts Catch Winds of Inclusion

Mendy Mandirahwe

As calls to create an inclusive community are getting louder, there are exciting developments happening in Chipinge with regards to inclusion of the Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

Ndau Festival of the Arts (NdaFA) whose base is at Paiyapo Heritage and Arts Development Centre, Bangira Village, Chikore in Chipinge is promoting arts for PWDs after incorporating Big Tree Primary School learners who have physical challenges. They are set to engage more schools.

In its pilot project, NdaFA introduced fine art to the learners with disabilities.

In the second phase of its project; the children with disabilities are undergoing mbira lessons following a donation of mbira instruments to the school.

Ndau Festival of the Arts received a donation of four mbira instruments, two from an arts organisation

named CHIPAWO in Harare and the other two from a seasoned artiste and teacher named Ticha Muzavazi. Speaking to this publication, the chairman and director for Ndau Festival of the Arts, Mr Phillip Kusasa said that Children With Disabilities need to be given a platform to showcase their talent.

"Children With Disabilities are also talented but what might be lacking is the issue of inclusion. Once People with Disabilities are given the platform, we can see that they can show case their talent. This is just a pilot project but we need to do more of such for the whole of Chipinge district," said Mr Kusasa.

Other schools are also set to join in this movement.



CDC Shines the Light on Psychosocial Disabilities

Clever Ndanga and Melisa Maunyangwe

African beliefs and myths has it that any form of impairment is caused by evil spirits or is a punishment from the Gods. As a result, the community, including relatives of people with disabilities tend to discriminate them. Vheneka village in rural ward 27 of Chipinge district wasn't spared in the beliefs and myths as the community considered it a taboo to accommodate persons with disabilities in that area.

However, this is now a thing of the past, thanks to a successful intervention by REPSSI and CBM Global through the Inclusive communities' project. The project identified, selected and trained Community Disability Champions (CDCs). The trained disability champions are conducting intensive community awareness to sensitise community members on issues of disability inclusion.

The CDCs are really doing what they were assigned and the village has recorded success stories. Trained Champions and Village health workers are now engaging the community to address challenges faced by persons with disabilities, chief among these disabilities are psychosocial disabilities. Community

members interviewed attested that the trained champions are now community myths busters and agents for the mental health referral pathway. The CDCs are not just being myths busters but have taken a step further to conduct community conversations that unpack psychosocial disabilities which were usually associated with witchcraft or evil spirits.

Through these community conversations, caregivers of persons with psychosocial disabilities are now opening up and acknowledging that they have children, parents or relatives that they tied up for what they had assumed to be spiritual attacks. After these disclosures, the Champions refer the persons with psychosocial disabilities to REPSSI or a local health facility to access specialized support and care.

Though more advocacy and sensitization needs to be done, communities are now opening up and accepting persons with psychosocial disabilities. Communities are set on the right track towards inclusive communities.



Main stream NGOs Trained on Disability Inclusion

Adelaide Nyandoro - Gatsi

To strengthen the capacity of NGOs in mainstreaming disability inclusion in their programming and enable them to offer psychosocial support to beneficiaries with disabilities, the Inclusive communities conducted a training. Non-governmental officers from mainstream NGOs in Chimanimani and Chipinge districts who directly offer services to persons with disabilities were targeted.

The training was an opportunity to improve the participants understanding of the national disability policy, disability inclusion and disability inclusive development. Introduction to psychosocial support definitions, models and concepts enabled the clear articulation of the importance of PSS and the importance of adopting holistic approaches and collaboration of different stakeholders to ensure that key strengths are complementary. The National disability policy of June 2021 was also unpacked. The policy serves as a major catalyst in disability rights movement enabling a shift from viewing persons with disabilities

as objects of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing them as full and equal members of society with human rights.

The training provided a platform for understanding of the disability and poverty cycle highlighting the importance of empowering persons with disabilities. The Washington group short set of questions were discussed, and the house agreed to incorporate them in all programming to ensure disability disaggregated data is collected. Universal design, accessibility and reasonable accommodation made participants realize the disservice they were doing to persons with disabilities that prevented equal and fair access to crucial services.

The Inclusive communities project continuous to engage gate keepers, law enforcers and key influential people to advocate for disability inclusion in all aspects to ensure that persons with disabilities live up to their full potential, enjoy their rights and have better living conditions.

Village Savings and Lending Associations - Agents of Meaningful Empowerment

Melisa Maunyangwe

A passionate, committed and united group of twenty women with disabilities and others standing in for their children with different impairments convened a meeting to discuss how they can change their lives as well as their families' lives for the better.

These women are found in a terrain which is not easy to reach for a person who has spent more time of his or her life in an urban setting. The place is dominated by thick forests of banana plantations, mountains, rocky roads and the place is called Mutsvangwa found in Chimanimani district, ward 23.

These women brainstormed on the kind of project that they would want to embark on so as to become independent and refrain from begging and surviving on handouts for the rest of their lives. This initiative was brought up by a Village Savings and Lending and Association (VSLA) facilitator who was trained to facilitate VSLA groups, she also cascaded the different ways of having ISALS hence the group agreed on business skills.

The group is called "KUSHINGA" (translated as endure), they started by contributing R20 per member every Friday of the week but did not lend each other the money because they had a vision to have a poultry project for sustainability.

After some time, the group members met and did their accounts only to realise that their money was enough for them to procure 25 broiler chicks and the feeds that can sustain the chicks up to the stage that they can be sold.



project.

REPSSI's Project Coordinator and Project Assistant visited the site after being invited to witness such a good initiative and they witnessed that the group really had 25 broilers which are almost ready for sale.

The group leader expressed gratitude to the inclusive communities' project for recognising persons with disabilities as they are now empowered to fend for themselves and their families. The leader expressed that the group wishes to expand the project to housing 100 broilers when they get seed fund to boost their

The PLIGHT of Adolescence Mothers With Disabilities

Clever Ndanga

As government and other partners are seized with addressing the plight of children and people with disabilities, there is a group that is being left behind. Adolescent mothers with disabilities is a growing group that is usually neglected.

The steady rise in numbers of adolescent mothers with disabilities can be attributed to lack of sexual and reproductive health services in both traditional and clinical form. In the inclusive communities implementation area which is largely rural, the traditional form of sexual reproductive education from the UN-CLES and AUNTIES is provided to adolescents with disabilities.

This is said to be chiefly because communities do not expect them to be sexually active, which is a myth that is shared by many caregivers. Another reason for failure of accessing this sexual and reproductive health and rights education is said to be none

availability of aunties who they can communicate using sign language for those with hearing impairment.

The thinking that adolescents with disabilities cannot be sexually active is said to be shared by some professionals as well. Health Care workers are said to find it complicated to give sexual and reproductive health services and commodities to adolescents with disabilities. One health care worker said that "when we teach or communicate SRH we make use of teaching aids such as pictures and videos. We do not have the teaching aids that are inclusive therefore its currently difficult to engage adolescents with disabilities without the crucial aids."

It is against this background that the inclusive communities plan to engage other partners to program around this unique cohort.



Journey of Life COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ACTION WORKSHOP 6: INVOLVING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES (CWD)- Purpose This facilitator training guide in REPSSI's Journey of Life series helps facilitators to help community members to support both children with disabilities and their caregivers. It supports facilitators to encourage in-depth discussions and action among members of the community on issues affecting children with disabilities and their caregivers. The facilitator training guide trains facilitators to use the community implementation guide which allows members of the community to move from awareness to action by providing them the opportunity to develop action plans that will assist in fulfilling the rights of children with disabilities and addressing the needs of their caregivers.