

Best practice for empowering children and young people with disabilities to drive change and claim their rights

This is a transcript of an interview held on 19 June 2018 between:

Alice Ford from [AbleChildAfrica](#), Community Partnership grant holders

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The subject of the interview was around **best practice for empowering children and young people with disabilities to drive change and claim their rights**.

Children with disabilities in Africa remain some of the most isolated and marginalised in the world.

We asked Alice Ford, Programmes Officer for AbleChildAfrica to talk about their project, and specifically, what the organisation believes is best practice for empowering children and young people with disabilities to drive change and claim their rights.

AbleChildAfrica's *Raising Aspirations* project contributes to the [SDGs](#)' aspiration to 'leave no one behind' in Rwanda, by empowering children and young people with disabilities to demand inclusion in the SDGs at grassroots level.

The project has been developed jointly with [UWEZO Youth Empowerment](#); a youth led DPO in Rwanda, and [AbleChildAfrica](#).

How confident are you that empowered children and young people with disabilities will be able to drive change and claim their rights?

We are very confident in the project's youth led approach.

There is strong political will in Rwanda to ensure the inclusion and realisation of rights for people with disabilities, and policy makers have informed us that they need to be taught to recognise barriers that exclude children with disabilities and to understand successful interventions. As such, the project will equip youth with disabilities with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to engage and coach civil society, communities, and schools on inclusive techniques, whilst collecting examples of best practices to produce an evidence-base to guide inclusive policy implementation for children and youth with disabilities in Rwanda.

How effective is the mentoring approach in empowering children with disabilities?



A key component of our *Raising Aspirations* project in Rwanda will be the implementation of our tried and tested mentoring approach, whereby youth with disabilities will work with children with disabilities to build their confidence, skills, and knowledge of disability rights. Our prior experience in implementing a mentoring model in Rwanda has demonstrated this effectiveness.

The mentoring model is unique in that it empowers both the children and youth with disabilities to take charge of initiatives that impact their own lives, building confidence in their abilities and ultimately fostering the creation of appropriate, local and youth led solutions to the challenges they face.

Is this approach sufficient to enable children with disabilities to claim their rights? If not, what else is the project doing to support and assist them in doing this?

Alongside mentoring, which places children and youth with disabilities at the centre of their own skills development and decision-making, the project will also train these mentors as disability right advocates, who themselves will recruit other youth with disabilities in order to create a nationwide network of change-makers. Together, this network will push their engagement and representation in existing government mechanisms and civil society structures to hold their government to account with evidence-based recommendations for inclusive SDG implementation.

In what ways does the national policy context in Rwanda enable or hinder the realisation of the rights of children with disability?

Whilst Rwanda is one of the fastest growing economies in Africa, more than 60% of the population live in poverty and, still recovering from the genocide in 1994, two thirds of Rwanda's population are under 25 years old. Rwandan children are now born into a culture that strongly discourages using or identifying with divisive labels and Rwanda passed a law in 2001 banning the discrimination of people with disabilities.

However, children with disabilities are 3 times less likely to access education and only 31% of young people with disabilities are in employment.

Whilst commending laudable advancements, there is still much to be done to ensure that youth with disabilities are able to realise their full potential in Rwanda.

Final word

Thank you to AbleChildAfrica for their support with this discussion. To find out more about their work, visit their website here: ablechildafrica.org

To view further learning products from UK Aid Direct, visit the website [here](#).