

Every Child Can Learn Podcast

Episode 22: Francis on the Amuru Disabled Persons Union

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Glades: Welcome to our 22nd episode of Every Child Can Learn. My name is Lanyero Glades, I work at Backup Uganda as a Lead Trainer. Today we are very happy once again to meet our new guest, who is going to tell us something more about himself. Our guest, you're most welcome.

Francis: Well, thank you, Glades. My name is Francis Okello Oloya. I am the Chairman Amuru Disabled Persons Union. I am visually impaired. And I'm a psychologist by training. I am very happy to meet you and to share more experiences. Thank you.

Glades: Okay, thank you so very much, Mr. Francis, for that introduction. Mr. Francis, can you tell us or tell me something about the work that you do as the Chairperson Amuru Disabled Persons Union? And maybe what does a regular workday look like for you? Thank you.

Francis: Amuru Disabled Persons Union is an umbrella organization for persons with disabilities in Amuru district, and all persons with disabilities, actually, the sub county leadership of persons with disabilities, subscribe to us. And then for us, we subscribe, to

NUDIPU the National Union of disabled persons union. Working for personal disabilities is something that we consider as a call. Because first of all, you need to have the empathy of wearing the shoe of that person with a disability so that you can serve them diligently. In our everyday work, you know, you face quite a number of issues, a child with disability needs some support. An adult with a disability also need support, including women, you know, so quite a number of issues come to our desks, some of which concerns right based issue. And also the issue of land rights, you know, and maybe also access to the social services, like health care services, you know, if a person with disability, especially those with hearing impairment, want to access medical health, health services, they may not access it easily because of the language barrier. So that also comes to our desks and we need to look forward to helping them through approaching the healthcare service providers. And sometimes we also need to get an expert sign language interpreter to come on board. So at the end of the day, you know the workloads may be like overwhelming but we will take it up. Yes.

Glades: Thank you so much, Mr. Francis, you really do a lot of work. And thanks so much to what you're doing to help the community. How does the union promote inclusive education? Or how does the union promote inclusion, especially for children with disabilities? Thank you.

Francis: Yeah, the district's union is working so much to promote inclusive education in the district. Right now, as I talk, we have been moving to the pilot schools and primary schools that have been supported under together for inclusion program. We have been sensitizing parents and teachers as well as the learners that we have a law that provides for a nondiscrimination for education services, that is in person with Disability Act, we emphasize that all learners have access to education services, and we had to provide or distribute copies of person with disability Acts to all the 10 schools in Amuru district. And starting from Lacor primary school, you know, we have Kayo, Agua Yugi, Pagak, Olia, Pofonya, and, the other school is Pawel Langetta, Pawel Lalem, we distributed these copies, to ensure that the teachers and the head teachers use this to know, understand what it takes to provide education service for person disability or a child with disability in their school. And, we also had to engage these parents and the learners through dialogue, to see what kind of needs do learners with disability have to be, you know, taken in considerations. And even when they're doing

budgeting, know the school, PTA, and the community, they need to include the budget for learners with disabilities. So our major role here is to advocate and let them know that it is us to plan for persons or learners with disabilities so that at the end of the day, you are providing services for all.

Glades: Thank you so much, again, for all the things that you have shared and the great work you are doing as the district and also as you Francis being the chairperson, disabled union. And now, I also would like you to share with us, what does the union offer to children with disabilities? And maybe could you also tell us how the union promotes inclusive learning? Thank you.

Francis: Yes. The union as an organization helps in soliciting or lobbying to get some of the assistive devices, for instance, the wheelchair, white cane, or maybe the eyeglasses, and for those that have, albino, albinism, we also look for people who can give them the cream that they use to help them you know, overcome the sun heat, and there are those that may need hearing aids. So we recommend them to be given such services. So our work is now to collaborate with partners who can support us in situations where we have those assistive devices at our disposal, we work out to assess the learners, you know, first of all, you need to do the assessment, the specialist need to come and then do the assessment. So that we give the right assistive device so that the person is not again subjected to another disability via using the assistive device. So, so far, we through NUDIPU, we managed to distribute 20 assistive devices to learners in Amuru district last year, in 2022, but the demand is really so much that we really need collaboration with other stakeholders. Yes,

Glades: Thank you once again, for that work you're doing and also providing assistive devices to these children with disabilities. Now, could you also share with us your success story that upon doing your activities with the different communities you've been able to see happening?

Francis: Our success stories or testimonies, I could say is that through the distribution of assistive devices, we were able to have the learners go to school, for instance, there is a girl in Agua Yugi primary school, who uses crutches and this aided her in a mobility to come to school and also access some of the classrooms and that was a very good support to her and

also another learner with a physical disability you know, this case actually severe case, the boy lives in Pokure village in Lacor parish, we had to give him a wheelchair and this wheelchair supports him to move around the compound access the toilet facility at home and sometimes the siblings also take him to church. So, this is one way of also making him socialize in the community. There is also another young boy who is in Parabongo we provided the eyeglasses and he could use it for reading because he had low vision. And that is another good support that we had to record that those that were able to receive hearing aid and at least they are able to hear some you know, words or communication, verbal communication from the teachers, although we now need to assess how much is it changing their you know, their understanding? Yes, so those are some of the success stories. And above all, the enrollment of learners with disabilities in schools have increased because through their awareness creation, now they know that they have the rights to access education in some of the schools around them, and I have also to interest you that through the collaboration with NUDIPU and, and, and some stakeholders, we were able to engage the school leadership to you know, support this issue of school feeding program. Once a learner with disability is feeding from the school, that is another big hope that you know, school is a safe place for us to study from And that is, I could call it a big achievement because maintaining them in school is one thing that we could also record under success. Thank you.

Glades: Thank you so much, Mr. Francis. And you've just mentioned the things that a lot of times as Backup Uganda, we've been emphasizing, first of all, keeping the learners with disabilities within the school, and just like you said, it's one thing to bring them to school and it's also another thing to take care of them in terms of feeding. And the program you have made sure that it's brought within the School of feeding is something that has really helped these children with disabilities. And I believe the people who are listening or who are going to listen to this program or to this recording, will benefit from it. And I also love the idea that a lot of children with disabilities have been identified in the communities, and they have been brought to school. This is something we always keep singing to the parents, that there is something unique, that this children with disabilities have, much as parents sometime ignore it and say, this child with disability, this child who is visually impaired, who has physical impairment, can no longer come to school can no longer mix up with the rest of the learners.

But I'm very grateful that what you are doing is going to do something even to the parents who have always been living their children at home. Thank you so much, once again, Mr. Francis, for sharing that. Lastly, I would also love you to help the listeners understand what can you say? Or what advice can you give to parents, the teachers and maybe the policymakers who are listening to this episode regarding children with disabilities or persons with disabilities? Thank you.

Francis: Well, very interesting question. As a person living with disability, I, first of all, want to let the parents know that disability is something that comes, you know, when you have not even applied for it. So we just urge you to take care of a child with disability and please talk to them, and find out what they need, that can support them to thrive, or to make success in life. Because when you don't support them, then they will depend on you all the time. When you go for a journey, or maybe you travel somewhere you will be thinking that how is my child doing now, who will take care of him when I'm not around. So at the end of the day we want to concentrate on being self-reliant. If you support the child, that child will have the ability to know get something to do. And then he or she will also be able to support the siblings later. And for the policymakers, I think we have good laws or ordinances and acts. But the implementation sometimes we take too long. We want a person with disability to come and shout, talk about their rights, and then we start responding but you as the responsible person, you need to take time to read like this person with disability Acts. A lot of times people don't even take concern to read. And it is until when we the person with disabilities start mentioning about Person with Disability Act, and also quoting some of the sections, then people will start saying that Oh, you're right, you're right. I need our people to you know, take it upon themselves that we live with persons with disabilities. When we support them, they will contribute to the development of this nation. And they also pay tax by the way. So even when you're doing the constructions, especially the classrooms, the toilets, and also the playgrounds, please look at yourself as a person with disability even when you are not. So that you what you're going to build will be accessible for all. If we do that, we shall have, you know, a very good environment conducive, friendly, and at the end of the day, we shall praise God for, you know, having such individuals to support learners with disabilities.

Glades: Thank you so much. What about the teachers, because these kids go to school and the teachers also have a role to play? What do you say about the teachers towards learners with disabilities?

Francis: Yes. The teachers, I know, you had a call to go and teach. And when you have learners, you need to be having inclusive kind of planning for that learner? You know, there is what they call individual learning needs. First, you need to know, what does this learner need? What is the challenge that they have? And how can you as a teacher work with the learner to support that learner to achieve because if the learner is present in the school, that learner has to participate, and also need to achieve when the learner achieves, then it is your pride as a teacher. And we need to take it seriously by the way, sometimes we celebrate, when we see other pupils excel in their examinations, but we leave aside the ones with the disabilities, the one with special needs, we don't concentrate on their performance, and at the end of the day, you find that out of the many that you have celebrated, that one who is left behind is dragging you, you know, it will spoil your success story. So we need to work hard. As teachers we need to consult, you can call us persons with disability union, to come and guide and also talk to the parents and learners so that you as a teacher can support these learners well.

Glades: Thank you very much. I believe the parents, the teachers, the policymakers out there, have really had what you've said. And what I can say is please to the parents, follow what Mr. Francis has said, let's love our children with disabilities. God as talented us in different ways, they may not be walking well rather, but there is something that the Lord has blessed them to do. And just like you've seen, a lot of politicians who have disabilities, but they are leaders. They are working in districts; they're working in the ministries, so let's not leave our children with disabilities at home. And then also I want to add on what Mr. Francis just mentioned, to the teachers that let's have at the back of our mind that these learners can perform these learners can do well. Let's have individualized learning needs that had let's identify individual learning needs within these children. And for us as Backup Uganda, we always have a session in one of our programs or in one of our trainings where we train teachers on how to do individualize support plan, helping children one on one. I know a lot of schools, even the ministries have also emphasized on that. I know they call it IEP that looks at helping these



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children one on one. Now I want to appreciate our guests so much. And as Backup Uganda, we always say every child can learn. Thank you.

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