

## THE PAN-AFRICAN MOVEMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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### HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

For two thousand years disabled people were publicly viewed and presented as sick, stupid, semi-idiotic, asexual and as people who cannot do anything for themselves. They needed other people to do things for them and to them. They were the *deserving poor* and were given licences to be beggars and some were put into institutions in order for them to be rehabilitated, rehabilitated and rehabilitated and then be *farmed* back into the world of the able-bodied where there are not facilities for disabled people. Disabled people remained excluded from all systems of community services such as transport, education, employment, sports and recreation, and others. Disability issues were not part of economic, political, cultural or social systems.

### PURPOSE, ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF ORGANISATIONS OF DISABLED PEOPLE

The development and growth of organisations of the disabled over the last twenty years has seen disabled people setting the terms of their participation in their communities and society. The paradigm shift from the medical to social approach has dramatically changed the attitudes towards disabled people and also changed the attitudes of disabled people towards themselves. They are no longer seen as objects of charity and pity and problems for society.

The declarations of the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons and Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992) made a great impact by bringing disabled people together from all over the world to share experiences and a great deal of latent energy was released. Disabled people started organising and uniting to create united voices at all levels.

The world has never been the same since. Disability is now on the social and political agenda and disabled people are out in the streets demonstrating and demanding full and equal participation in society and access to the general systems of society and to what others enjoy as a matter of course and as their right.

This is what the movement has achieved internationally in the short period of twenty years. It has created grassroots democratic national organisations of disabled people and voices of disabled people locally, nationally, regionally, continentally and internationally.

#### **SITUATION OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN AFRICA AND THE ROLE OF THE PAN-AFRICA FEDERATION OF THE DISABLED (PAFOD)**

While disabled people everywhere suffer similar discriminatory practices and negative attitudes, disability in Africa is a life and death issue, a question of survival. Disabled people in Africa are fighting for basic human rights and have no access to basic human necessities and appliances. Most governments do not include the needs of disabled people in their national socio-economic planning and programmes. Since government funding is often scarce, most services for disabled Africans have historically been provided by charitable organisations, often funded by donors from industrialised countries. For example, special schools and hospitals catering for the needs of people with particular impairments have been a feature of African society for many years. But many of these organisations fail to involve disabled people in decision-making about the services they want.

Spurred on by the achievements of other groups, such as the women's, workers' and black civil rights movements, disabled Africans have begun to discuss amongst themselves how they wish to be represented and how they can take control of their lives. Increasingly, disabled Africans realise that they face common barriers in education, employment, access to services and information – and that they are in the best position to know the solution to the problems they face. In the last two decades, organisations of disabled people have sprung up throughout the continent at all levels. They provide forums for discussion and action, representing the opinions and concerns of disabled people in ways which organisations for disabled people never can. By linking together nationally and internationally, a new civil rights movement in Africa has been born.

PAFOD was formed in 1994 in Zambia, based on the philosophy that disabled Africans are in the best position to know the solutions to the problems they face. The main objective of PAFOD is to develop and strengthen national organisations in Africa and provide an umbrella forum for disabled Africans and their governments to discuss issues of full participation by disabled people and violation of the rights of disabled persons in Africa. PAFOD also represents disabled people and seeks to influence policy decisions in favour of disabled people at continental level (OAU) and within regional, economic and political entities such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

PAFOD is a co-ordinating committee comprising the five sub-regional federations of grassroots umbrella organisations of disabled people in Africa:

- Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD)
- North Africa Federation of the Disabled (NAFOD)
- East Africa Federation of the Disabled (EAFOD)
- West Africa Federation of the Disabled (WAFOD)
- Central Africa Federation of the Disabled (CAFOD)

## ACHIEVEMENTS

There is much to celebrate, thanks to the efforts of African organisations of disabled people. In recent years they have:

- Influenced policy makers to pass legislation and support programmes for disabled people's rights and integration.
- Helped to raise the status of disabled people, highlighting the inequality which disabled people face.
- Shown appropriate ways in which equality of opportunity can be achieved.
- Been actively involved in the formation of constitutions.
- Helped to elect disabled Members of Parliament.

PAFOD is also actively promoting UN human rights instruments including the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (WPACDP) and Standard Rules on Equalisation of Opportunities for Disabled People as a basis for policy formulation and legislation.