

**RWANDA CASE STUDY:
RWANDAN NATIONAL DECADE STEERING COMMITTEE
POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY PROCESS LOBBYING**

During 2006 and 2007 the government of Rwanda, together with their development partners, civil society and the private sector developed the country's second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The final draft of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS) was published in June 2007.

For the first time members of the Rwandan National Decade [for People with Disabilities] Steering Committee, the Union of the Blind, the Union of the Deaf, the Association of Physically Disabled and the Parent's Association of Children with Mental Disabilities were invited to participate in the EDPRS process. In the PRSP formulation phase, 11 Sector Working Groups have been formed and the Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) prioritised the Education, Health and Social Protection Sector Working Groups.

VSO Rwanda provided training and facilitated strategic planning workshops with DPOs representatives and as a result their understanding of the EDPRS process and their advocacy strategies and lobbying messages were strengthened. VSO also provided support to the DPO representatives by coordinating their attendance at Sector Working Group meetings, arranged for EDPRS documents to be printed in Braille and for sign language interpretation at Sector Working Group meetings.

A 'Social Inclusion' checklist was developed, which detailed the rights people with disabilities were demanding and the policy changes that would be needed in the Education, Health and Social Protection Sectors, through participatory consultation workshops with DPO representatives.

Support for the rights of people with disabilities was built by identifying common concerns with representatives of other groups (the elderly, vulnerable children and youth, refugees and returnees, the Batwa ethnic minority, ex-combatants and genocide survivors), whose rights were then also detailed in the checklist. The checklist was then actively used by the donor, civil society and government members in the Sector Working Groups, during the planning of their Sector log frames.

For the first time in Rwanda, people with disabilities actively participated in high level meetings and influenced long term policy. Disability was talked about, and became visible in an unprecedented way. As an example of some of the many successful outcomes, the following interventions were agreed in the Social Protection Log Frame:

- Health insurance revised to provide treatment for 100% of vulnerable people unable to afford it by 2011
- Partial tax exemption for employers who employ vulnerable people (disabled, elderly) in place by 2011
- Free public transport for the elderly and disabled, and unemployed young graduates provided by end of 2008
- Recruitment procedures revised to positively discriminate in favour of people with disabilities by end of 2008

Although DPOs actively participated in the initial stages of the EDPRS process, their involvement decreased as the EDPRS process has progressed. Fewer opportunities arose for DPOs to engage in the process at the national level and to lobby for including disability as a crosscutting issue.

However, their active participation in the early stages bore fruit and for the first time the EDPRS makes specific references to disability on inclusive education and sustainable self-support:

*'In the area of special needs, the educational aim is to improve access and retention of vulnerable children. These children include the [...] **physically and mentally handicapped**. Efforts will be made to [...] ensure that school management is inclusive. The school curriculum will be revised to be more responsive to the needs of **children with disabilities**'.*

*'In order to enable food insecure households to move into sustainable self-support, the sector will establish a range of employment alternatives for this category of vulnerable people and ensure that issues of gender equity and **disability** are taken into account'.*

Furthermore, there are a couple of references to social protection, social inclusion and vulnerable groups, which can be interpreted as being in favour of people with disabilities. These include e.g. effective and sustainable social protection, which is going to be implemented by establishing budget lines for different vulnerable groups. It also refers to the establishment of a comprehensive social safety net based on a feasibility study to determine vulnerability criteria, establish the number of vulnerable people who would be eligible and to assess their different needs.

References to disability within the EDPRS paper are a major first step, but effective DPOs and a strong movement will be essential to continue lobbying for timely implementation of the new EDPRS policies. Lobbying is also beginning to change

attitudes towards an acceptance of disabled people's rights and a belief in the capacity and potential of people with disabilities within government ministries and donor circles.

Even though the EDPRS is a national strategy, it will be implemented by the Districts. Therefore the Districts started in a parallel process to work on developing District Development Plans. District Development Plans are guided by the national EDPRS whilst taking local characteristics and needs into account. The DPOs felt that this process presents an excellent opportunity to insert the disability issue firmly into the development of Districts. They worked initially with Rutziro District, one of the 30 Districts in Rwanda, to explore opportunities. Through intensive awareness raising and sensitisation on disability issues, Rutziro District Authorities put one objective in their Plan which committed them to identifying and categorising people with disabilities in order to allow effective planning to realise their rights to public services and assistance. They also allocated a separate budget of approximately o \$USD 1 million for disability.

During the next stages of the campaign, the challenge remains to roll out the success from Rutziro District to the other 29 Districts and, at the national level, to advise on and monitor the implementation of the EDPRS.