

Lesotho National Federation of Organisations of the Disabled statement on AIDS Day

In 2011, World health organisation and the World Bank published a disability world report which estimated the population of persons with disabilities around the globe at 15% of the world's population, one billion persons with disabilities. That is 80% of these people live in the developing world.

The report further states that, persons with disabilities encounter considerable barriers in trying to access social, economic, political, and healthcare services due to the discrimination and stigma attached to disability.

In Lesotho, persons with disabilities constitutes 2.5% of the total population according to the Bureau of Statistics population housing census report (2016).

Nevertheless, the disability sensitive data collection in Lesotho remains a huge challenge which continue to hinder accurate planning and targeting for persons with disabilities. For example, the number of persons with disabilities living with HIV/AIDS is not known because data is not disaggregated based on disability.

This situation denies Lesotho an opportunity to design and implement disability inclusive HIV/AIDS policies and programs which can turn around the vulnerability of persons with disabilities.

In Lesotho, there are no direct and specific HIV/AIDS programs targeting persons with disabilities living with HIV/AIDS and the entire population to ensure that they receive information on HIV/AIDS; they take preventative measures; they take treatment, and they ensure their right to privacy on an equal basis with others when it comes to healthcare services relating to HIV/AIDS. This is happening despite the research indicating Lesotho to be one of the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world.

Access to public health information on HIV/AIDS for persons with disabilities

Persons with disabilities continue to suffer social inequalities due to lack of HIV/AIDS services which is not made available in accessible formats including in Braille, audio for the blind and partially sighted people, sign language for the deaf community; easy to read materials for persons with intellectual disabilities. Lack of accessible materials for these people make them vulnerable to contracting HIV since they continue to practise risky sexual behaviour exposing them to HIV due lack of accessible information.

LNFOOD calls upon the HIV/AIDS stakeholders including government through the Ministry of Health and NAC to consider persons with disabilities as a key population which requires targeted approach in order to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS among them.

Inaccessibility

Persons with disabilities continue to encounter physical infrastructure which is making it difficult for them to access HIV/AIDS services at both private and public health posts and hospitals. The physical infrastructure made without persons with disabilities in mind create barriers to accessing HIV/AIDS services for persons with disabilities.

Inaccessible public transport and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities by the health workers continue to make things worse for persons with disabilities in need of HIV/AIDS services.

In several platforms, persons with disabilities who are need of HIV/AIDS testing services have always raised the concern of lack of privacy for them when testing for HIV/AIDS. They are concerned that the testing services remain absolutely open with no privacy as it is a requirement.

Testing devices are not accessible for the visually impaired community including the deaf community.

LNFOD calls upon the Ministry of Health, NAC and other stakeholders in this field to work with organisations of persons with disabilities to identify technologies which can maintain secrecy of the testing services and support organisations of persons with disabilities to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS services among persons with disabilities across the country.

Participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the HIV/AIDS services

Lesotho is a state party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities (CRPD) and has recently promulgated Persons with Disability

Equity Act to ensure inclusion of persons with disabilities in all spheres of life.

Both human rights instruments require government and private agencies working in this field to collaborate with persons with disabilities and not for them in the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluating the HIV/AIDS disability inclusive programs to ensure that they really respond to the needs of persons with disabilities.

LNFOD is however concerned that Lesotho has not yet achieved human rights-based approach in initiating this approach as organisations of persons with disabilities are not meaningfully participating in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of HIV/AIDS programs implemented within the country.

LNFOD therefore calls upon government agencies and the development partners to consider funding organisations of persons with disabilities so that they may advocate for the full and effective participation of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation of HIV/AIDS programs to ensure that they really respond to the real needs of the Basotho population with disabilities.