



Supporting Advocacy for Women with Disabilities through strong public relations and communication: A Best Practice Approach from GIZ Uganda and IDIWA

Women and girls with disabilities in Uganda face heightened discrimination on account of gender and disability and are among the poorest and most left behind in their communities. Compared to their peers without disabilities, they are at higher risk of being subject to violence, especially sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). To combat violence against women and girls with disabilities, their perspectives, experiences and knowledge must be heard in politics and society. Attention is best achieved through strong self-advocacy organisations.

ADVOCACY FOR EQUAL ACCESS AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

An important organisation in promoting equal access and empowerment of women and girls with disabilities in Uganda is “Integrated Disabled Women Activities” (IDIWA). IDIWA is an indigenous voluntary, non-governmental and non-profit organisation founded in 2000 by women of different disability categories including physical, sensory, and learning disabilities together with parents of children with disabilities in Uganda. They address challenges of women and girls with disabilities with advocacy and empowerment

through self-help community-based development programs. The organisation focuses on empowerment of its target group by advocating for

- › human rights,
- › appropriate access to social services and productive resources for economic empowerment,
- › health and reproductive rights,
- › education and participation and development of inclusive governance processes.

IDIWA envisions an inclusive society in which women and girls with disabilities and their families are self-reliant, empowered, and respected. From its establishment IDIWA has been actively involved in disability inclusive governance and is one of the leading organizations in this field in Uganda.

GIZ IN UGANDA: SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

On behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and co-funded by the EU, the Governance and Civil Society Programme (2017–2022) and its component “Civil Society in Uganda Support Programme” (CUSP) aims at realising human rights and implementing the principles of good governance. The

component is implemented in all regions of Uganda. The portfolio-wide approach which creates linkages across projects and programmes to the cross-cutting issue of civil society allows the Governance Programme to exploit commonalities with other projects or programmes on the issue of water, energy, and rural development. GIZ Uganda has been supporting Civil Society Organisations like IDIWA through the CUSP component and supported IDIWA with capacity development and the development of a professional communication strategy in 2021.

COMMITTED TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND DISABILITY INCLUSION

The governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Ugandan government have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD), thus committing to the promotion of equal rights and equal participation in society for persons with disabilities. In addition, the German and the Ugandan government have undertaken to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its guiding principle “Leave No One Behind”. The collaboration between the GIZ CUSP component and IDIWA contributes to the achievement of SDG 5 (“gender equality”) and SDG 10



Participants of IDIWA-GIZ Communication Training | © Elisabeth Kayanga

(“Reduce inequality within and among countries”). This is also in line with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and its special interest in promoting disability inclusion and gender equality through its development cooperation.

A COLLABORATION FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY OF IDIWA'S APPROACH

The official partnership between GIZ CUSP and IDIWA started in 2019 with a structured, organisational capacity assessment conducted by advisors from GIZ CUSP. In a next step the development of a capacity development plan in close collaboration with IDIWA followed.

One of the key challenges identified during the assessment related to communication and external relations: IDIWA had a communication strategy that was drafted in 2019. However, the strategy lacked clear communication management guidelines, hence limiting opportunities for networking, collaboration, and support towards IDIWA programmes. It also contributed to the fact that IDIWA had high costs for media coverage although it was implementing exciting operational programmes.

To address this challenges IDIWA signed a local subsidy agreement with GIZ CUSP to implement a communication project from May to September 2021. The project aimed at strengthening IDIWA's public relation management and promoting the visibility of their operational programmes as part of a revised communication strategy.

IDIWA hired a local expert in media and communication and disability inclusion to support the development of a comprehensive communication strategy, and to develop a training manual including clear guidelines and practical tools for disability inclusive reporting for media and communication experts.

The process started in May 2021 with a two-day communication strategy development workshop with IDIWA staff and board members. During the training

cycle and consultation meetings participatory approaches involving staff, board members and external stakeholders were applied. To ensure accessibility and non-discrimination, a simplified version of the communication strategy was designed, translated into local language, and embossed into braille.

IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH CLEAR ROLE DEFINITION AND OWNERSHIP

Through the capacity building measures IDIWA was able to develop a three year communication strategy. The strategy clearly stipulates each one's role in communication from the board to program departments and staff/ project officers.

The project supported trainings of 30 journalists on disability inclusion, human rights and SGBV. This enhanced the knowledge and awareness of journalists on disability and SGBV reporting. Most of the trained journalists have joined the local gender-based violence and disability rights network and are participating in the different thematic working groups of the network. As a result, the journalists are aware and willing to document and air activities of the network on their media houses without taking fees from IDIWA.



MILESTONES:

- › 1 communication strategy developed
- › 30 journalists trained on disability, human rights and SGBV reporting
- › 20 staff, board members and partners trained on media engagement and public relations

As part of the project, IDIWA also conducted a one-day training for 20 staff and board members and external partners on media engagement and public relations with a focus on COVID-19, HIV/AIDS and climate change communication.

“As a result of the project, we are witnessing improved collaboration and strategic engagement and positive public relations with the media. This is very critical for the nature of our work as journalists have now picked up interest and personal initiative in positive reporting on disability and GBV and follow up of cases. There is improved visibility of the organizations’ work to the public which has increased our opportunities for collaboration and networking with such organizations which creates a comparative advantage.”

(IDIWA representative)

To ensure effective implementation of the communication strategy, IDIWA recruited a professional communication officer in 2022 who is spearheading all communication actions. The officer has also embarked on capacity strengthening for staff members. This ensures all members can equally participate and carry

out communication activities in the organization.

This has led to more awareness on the importance of professional communication among the IDIWA team. IDIWA is currently establishing a communications unit in the organization to ensure sustainability and continuity.

SUCCESS FACTOR: OWNERSHIP OF ORGANISATIONS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

From the very beginning IDIWA was proactively seeking the cooperation with GIZ, pushing forward the agenda of gender and disability inclusive governance. IDIWA developed all project related documents including the Terms of Reference for the selection process of the consultant itself, defining its own targets and methodologies. This was demonstrating clear responsibility for the success of the communication project. The local expertise of the consultant, the ownership of IDIWA and its clear agenda proved to be key factors for the impact and sustainability of the project. The structured and partner-oriented approach of GIZ CUSP, including tailor-made capacity assessments for every partner organisation, also turned out to be a success factor.



WGDs participates in a match during the IDD | © Elisabeth Kayanga

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