



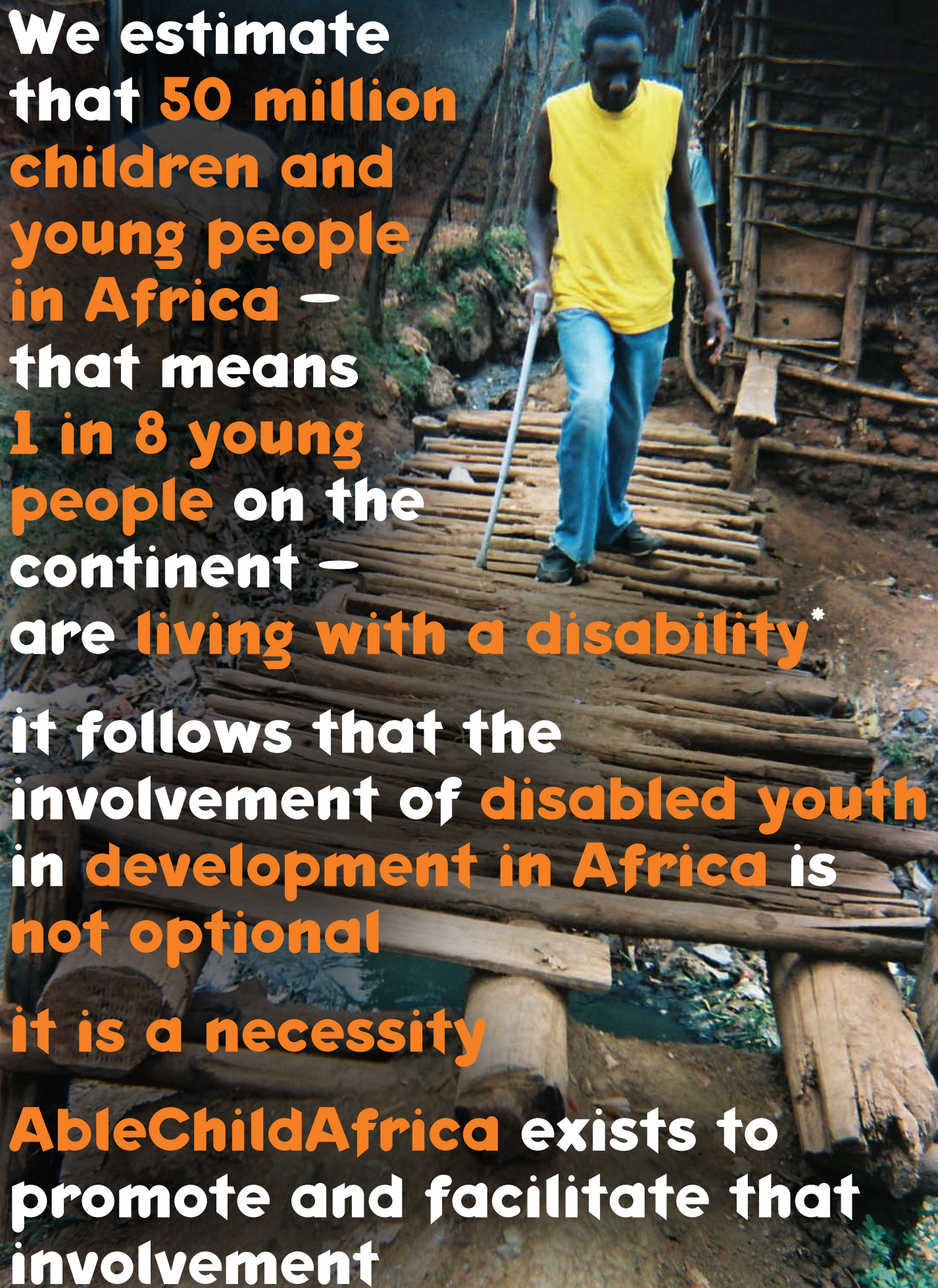
AbleChildAfrica

Working with disabled children and young people

Strategic Plan

2007-2012



A man with a cane is walking across a narrow wooden bridge made of logs over a river. He is wearing a yellow sleeveless shirt and blue jeans. The background shows a rustic wooden structure and a dirt path.

**We estimate
that 50 million
children and
young people
in Africa –
that means
1 in 8 young
people on the
continent –
are living with a disability***
it follows that the
involvement of **disabled youth**
in **development in Africa** is
not optional
it is a necessity
AbleChildAfrica exists to
**promote and facilitate that
involvement**

* Based on the AU estimate that 10% of people living in Africa have a disability and the fact that over half the continents population is under 18 years of age.

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introduction

AbleChildAfrica is the new name for the Uganda Society for Disabled Children in the UK. More than five years since the Uganda office became an independent local NGO we felt the time was right to re-focus the work of the UK office. We launched a two-year consultation process through which we identified a need to build the capacity of local organisations in Africa to promote the rights of young disabled people. We also identified a need to encourage a wide range of stakeholders to come together to ensure that young disabled people in Africa can fully participate in the development of their continent.

As a result of the consultation process we have developed this, the first AbleChildAfrica strategic plan. Our experience supporting USDC over the past 20 years means that we are uniquely placed, in terms of experience and learning, to develop a programme of work that builds the capacity of local organisations and creates linkages which can change the future for young disabled people in Africa. As one of the first UK-based organisations to show commitment to African-led development, we are also proud of our continued emphasis on local ownership and leadership.



Vision

A world in which all young disabled people are able to achieve their full potential

Mission

To promote and facilitate the participation of young disabled people in all aspects of development in Africa

Values

At AbleChildAfrica we value:

- a rights-based approach
- the full participation of children and their families
- strong and positive partnership
- equality, honesty and respect
- local ownership and leadership of programmes

Where we are going

In five years we will be an established point of contact for those working with young disabled people in Africa, providing resources and support to local partner organisations and a wide range of information and learning opportunities to ensure that young disabled people can be involved in development in Africa. We will seek change in policy and practice at local, national and international levels, so that the rights of young disabled people are achieved. An open and transparent partner, we will create internal policies and systems which will promote the involvement of young disabled people, and clearly illustrate how our resources have been used.

Summary of Strategic Objectives

- 1 Effect change in policy and practice so that the rights of young disabled people are mainstreamed across Africa, nationally and locally**
- 2 Support African models for ensuring that young disabled people are included in the development of their communities**
- 3 Develop AbleChildAfrica so that it can effectively support and initiate activities to achieve its mission**

- 4 Develop child-focused policies and systems which enable both us and partners to ensure full participation, accountability and child safety**

A Social Model of Disability

Over 20 years our approach in Uganda evolved from one of welfare provision for a handful of young disabled people to a nation-wide strategy which seeks to promote the rights of all young disabled people. In 1985, disability was a specialist issue and young disabled people in Uganda were an object of people's sympathy. With time we incorporated the social model of disability in to our approach. The social model helps us to see disability as a consequence of social marginalisation which requires attitudes to change. This model contrasts with the medical model dominant in the past which sees disabilities as illnesses which need to be cured. Overtime, with the hard work of organisations like ADD² and NUDIPU³, as well as our implementing partners USDC, Uganda has made some significant advances in terms of the realisation of the rights of disabled people. Young disabled people are increasingly seen as equal citizens, deserving of rights rather than sympathy.

The Chair of the new UN Disability Convention stressed that what was needed was a paradigm shift in the attitudes and treatment of people with disabilities – from seeing persons with disabilities as objects of charity to considering them as individuals with human rights. The Convention includes a specific Article on children with disabilities, which provides that States should 'ensure the full enjoyment of children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children', that the best interests of the child should be the primary consideration, and that children with disabilities should have rights to express views on an equal basis⁴. There is also provision elsewhere in the Convention for reproductive rights⁵, as well as an article which recognises the importance of international co-operation, including activities by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) in the realisation of the Convention⁶.

The Environment: Childhood Disability in Africa

The UN African Decade of Disability began in 1999, when the Heads of State of the African Union made a proclamation on the *Full Participation, Equality and Empowerment of People with Disabilities in Africa*. In it they recognised that environmental hazards, natural disaster, accidents, conflict and war increase the levels of disability on the continent. They recognised the need to improve the provision for people with disabilities and that 'much more needs to be done to enable persons with disabilities to develop their full potential so that they may live as agents of their own destiny in the rapidly changing economic and social conditions of the continent'. They acknowledged that changes needed to be made to the provision of opportunities and services, as well as in attitudinal change and accessibility.

Against this backdrop, disability movements in Africa have begun to make some headway towards achieving change and in lobbying their governments to improve provision for people with disabilities⁷. In Uganda significant participation in political life has been achieved, but there is still a need to ensure that positive policies are translated into inclusive practice. The presence of USDC in Uganda means that the government will be continually reminded of its responsibility to ensure the involvement of young disabled people in development processes. Increasingly,

USDC is working towards ensuring that children and their families are involved in demanding the fulfilment of their rights. In many African countries this process is only just beginning.

Most African countries have not collected accurate national statistics about the numbers of young disabled people who live there. We do know that over half the continent's population is under the age of 18. We also know that on average approximately 10% of people worldwide are living with disability⁸. We therefore estimate that 50 million people, one in every 18 people living on the African continent, is a young disabled person⁹.

There are a number of international and national NGOs working on disability issues, ADD concentrates on capacitating the disability movement but does not focus specifically on children. A number¹⁰ restrict their activities to a single-disability and those who look at a range of disabilities¹¹ do not specialise, specifically, in working with children and young people. Many international NGOs who work with children include some disability-related projects in their work¹², but many still see childhood disability as a marginal concern. Some child-centred organisations have incorporated activities with young disabled people into their work, but a concerted effort to improve the lives of young disabled people in Africa is still lacking. On top of this most African countries lack any co-ordinated effort to address the rights of young disabled people, and to ensure their participation.



Developing this plan

In the process of developing this plan we consulted disabled children, young disabled people, parents and carers and a whole range of professionals and organisations who work with them. The consultation process took place during 2005 and 2006 and involved discussions in 4 countries; Uganda, Kenya, Zambia and Malawi. We spoke to 173 young disabled people¹³, 101 young people¹⁴ and 284 parents many of whom were part of the 24 Parents Support groups whom we talked to. In each country we also spoke to:

- Disabled Peoples Organisations
- Professionals in the health, education and community development sector
- Local officials and religious leaders
- NGOs and CBOs (Community-Based Organisations) with an interest in childhood disability and with whom USDC had already been working¹⁵
- Other large mainstream development organisations
- Government partners (responsible for education, health, social development and disability).

We worked with USDC, our existing partners in Uganda on the consultation process in Uganda. In Kenya, Zambia and Malawi we developed relationships with existing stakeholders in government and civil society which helped us to establish a similar process of consultation and research. We shared draft versions of our plans with a range of development organisations in the UK, Uganda and Kenya and asked groups of young disabled people to review it before developing this final version.

Through this process our most disturbing findings were about the continued rejection, neglect, abuse and marginalisation of young disabled people. This illustrates the huge distance that has to be travelled in terms of attitude by communities, families, NGOs and governments if young disabled people are to be afforded their human rights. This process will require a huge shift in all of our attitudes and a total re-think of our approach to ability and inclusion.

We were continually reminded that many parents still feel that the birth of a disabled child is a great misfortune:

‘God is unjust because he creates. I am not a bad person but I have to look after a child with disability. Bad people do not face similar fate’ a mother said during a focus group discussion in Uganda.

‘... the father and the stepmother of a disabled child locked him in a goat house without feeding him so that he could die. The neighbours became curious and concerned when they did not see the child around for two days. Since nobody could tell them of the whereabouts of the child, they called in the local councillor who mounted a search and found the child in a frightening state.’

We also found that most men blamed disability on mothers and believed that they had brought misfortune into the home by giving birth to young disabled people. A local government worker in Uganda was one of many men who denied parenting a disabled child; *‘I do not give birth to such children’*.

Addressing the attitudes of parents and everyone else in communities will be of critical importance if the rights of young disabled people are to be realised. In addition the consultation also identified some very specific challenges in relation to accessing services and opportunities which have informed the development of this strategy. We found that young disabled people struggled at each stage to access the services which they needed in terms of healthcare and rehabilitation, education, training and later employment. By supporting local organisations to develop locally appropriate examples of how these challenges can be met we believe that we will be building long term capacity as well as contributing to the necessary change in attitudes.

In summary the consultation process made it very clear to us that if the rights of young disabled people are to be taken seriously, we need to encourage children to talk about their lives and to tell us more about the problems they face. We need to support initiatives which can provide solid examples to governments of the extent of the need, and of ways in which these needs can be addressed. We also need to support initiatives which can facilitate efforts to ensure that young disabled people are fully involved in development processes.

Strategic Objectives

Over the next five years AbleChildAfrica will:

1 Effect change in policy and practice so that the rights of young disabled people are mainstreamed across Africa, nationally and locally

By 2012 we would like development organisations, the UK public and international decision makers to be significantly more aware about the lives of young disabled people in Africa. We want to see increased awareness actually affecting the decisions which they make. We will do this by collecting information which can be used to inform policy makers and by creating opportunities for young disabled people to talk about their lives and the problems which they face. We will build the capacity of young disabled people, and the organisations who work with them, to express themselves to a wider audience and ask for the changes they believe are necessary to ensure the achievement of their rights. We will also provide support to organisations who concentrate their work in other areas, but who have an interest in this field, by offering support for integrating the concerns of young

disabled people in their work.

Key Outcomes

- Information about childhood disability is accessible and good practice is shared
- Young disabled peoples' needs are integrated in to the policies and programmes which affect them
- Young disabled people participate in advocating their rights
- Mainstream development agencies have integrated the concerns of young disabled people into their work

Key Activities

- Collect information and resources about childhood disability and about best practice in advocating the rights of young disabled people
- Support our partners to carry out advocacy work to improve the rights of young disabled people
- Build the capacity of young disabled people to advocate their rights
- Work to persuade and support mainstream development agencies to include young disabled people using USDC and its achievements as a key resource





2 Support African led models for ensuring that young disabled people are included in the development of their communities

Over the next five years we will identify at least four new partner organisations. We are committed to locally-led solutions and, rather than establishing new organisations, we will seek instead to find ways to support existing local organisations in specific areas/aspects of their work. By accompanying our partners on a journey towards inclusion we will seek to build their capacity and provide them with the skills which they need to expand or improve their work. The exact nature of the support offered will be identified in consultation with the partners and be developed together during the first year of the partnership. Capacity building is likely to be a significant component. We will develop guidelines for partnership, and partners will be expected to commit to basic principles of quality and accountability to ensure that they share the key values of AbleChildAfrica.

Key Outcomes

- Five partner organisations (including USDC) have been supported to develop local models which promote and facilitate the participation of young disabled people in development in Africa
- Partner organisations are able to share good practice and learn from one another

Key Activities

- Develop partnerships with at least four new organisations
- Continue to support USDC Uganda within this new framework
- Provide financial support to partners and monitor the impact of that support
- Accompany partners and help build their capacity so that their work becomes more effective and more inclusive
- Provide opportunities for learning and networking amongst our partner organisations

3 Develop AbleChildAfrica so that it can effectively support and initiate activities to achieve its mission

Relaunched as AbleChildAfrica, we will develop a new image and build our support base from new and existing constituencies. We will develop the organisation as a specialist 'brand' known for advocating for the rights of, and working with, young disabled people in Africa. As part of this remit we will develop networking activities for organisations with an interest in childhood disability, so that information and learning can be shared. Internally we will prioritise the following elements of Organisational Development:

Organisational Culture

We want to develop a dynamic new organisation which can manage the work ahead; which empowers people and organisations and which respects diversity without sacrificing our core values and our commitment to the rights of young disabled people. We are committed to African leadership and African-inspired solutions, and we want to recognise all of this in our governance as well as in the people with whom we work. Over the next five years we will review the governance of the organisation and update the resources, guidelines and support which we provide for Trustees. By carrying out a skills audit on a regular basis, we will ensure that our board is fit for purpose and adequately represents the constituencies with whom we work.

Resources

The new strategy will necessitate increased resources, both human and financial. We currently have two staff members and two volunteers. We envisage a team of at least five full-time staff by 2012. We will seek support for this new work from new and existing sources, aiming to triple our overall turnover to approximately £1,800,000 by 2012.

Geography

Our work will be focused in Africa. We have begun detailed research into the situation of young disabled people in Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia and Kenya. We shall seek to work in countries where we believe that we have identified partners who are capable of making a significant contribution towards our mission, and where there is an identifiable and demonstrable need. We are open to project work with national umbrella organisations or local groups which seek to work towards the participation of disabled and young people in the development process in Africa. This is likely to involve working in both rural and urban areas.

Key Outcomes

- AbleChildAfrica is financially secure and its funding is diverse enough to ensure future sustainability
- AbleChildAfrica is known for work with young disabled people in Africa
- AbleChildAfrica is a specialist agency in the field of childhood disability in Africa and is able to provide information and learning to people in Africa and world-wide

Key Activities

- Launch AbleChildAfrica and develop it as a brand
- Diversify our funding base (see business plan) and increase our income to reach £1.8m by 2012
- Provide networking opportunities for development partners to interact with each other and learn about childhood disability issues
- Provide a signposting service for people looking for information about childhood disability, which is easily accessible to communities in sub-Saharan Africa
- Build capacity of AbleChildAfrica's board

4 Develop child-focused policies and systems which enable both us and partners to ensure full participation, accountability and child safety.

The expressed needs of young disabled people will be at the heart of our work. We will work with our partners to ensure effective consultation at the planning stages of projects and to establish mechanisms by which young disabled people can monitor, comment on and complain about the activities which we support. A commitment to making young disabled peoples' ideas central to their work will be an essential criterion for selecting our partners. We are committed to accountable governance and management, which allows supporters, partners and 'beneficiaries' to access information about how we work, who is supporting us and the benefit derived from our work. Over the next five years we will develop systems which make this a reality, allowing young disabled people and their parents to see how we spend our money, and donors to track how their money is being used. We will also work to promote organisations which are child safe and seek to ensure that the activities which we support do not put children at risk.

Key Outcomes

- Our work is directly informed and monitored by young disabled people
- The quality (as well as the quantity) of our work can be measured
- Partners at every level (including donors as well as young disabled people) can obtain meaningful information about our work and how it is developed, funded and monitored
- AbleChildAfrica and its partners are child safe

Key Activities

- Develop a planning and review framework, which emphasises consulting and involving young disabled people
- Ensure that this framework addresses the issue of quality and actively participate in initiatives in the sector which seek to improve quality and transparency
- Develop a means by which both our supporters and the people with whom we work can monitor what we do with the funds we receive and the impact which we make
- Create a child protection policy and make the development of such a policy a condition of our partnership agreements
- Put a complaints system in place





Thematic Areas

As a result of our consultation process we identified seven thematic areas which we want to focus upon:

Advocacy and Child Rights

In Uganda we support USDC to carry out lobbying locally and nationally. Staff and partners have been trained in child rights and in advocacy and lobbying techniques. For the first time young disabled people and their families have been able to participate effectively in advocating their rights. Child Rights Clubs have been formed in schools and children of mixed abilities encouraged to participate in order to encourage peer understanding and shared experiences. We will support new partners in projects which seek to work with young disabled people to advocate their rights.

Education

Access to education is a common problem for young disabled people across Africa. Even where positive policies exist, practical constraints often prevent children from obtaining a quality education. In Uganda, the policy of Universal Primary Education (UPE) provides for all children to access free primary education. However, in reality, many young disabled people need support to benefit from the education offered at their local primary school. We have sought to tackle this in partnership with USDC by providing examples to government of how integration can be achieved. We have done so by equipping teachers with the skills they need to educate young disabled people, refurbishing classrooms to make them accessible and providing resources for learning. USDC has also established Child Rights' Clubs in schools, which involve young disabled people and their peers in a range of activities to improve children's understanding of their varied abilities. These activities have increased the number of young disabled people attending school and their level of integration. We will support new partners in projects which seek to improve access to education for young disabled people.

Health

Many young disabled people in Africa do not have access to the rehabilitative care which they need. We have supported USDC Uganda to provide a range of support to the health care system. Professionals have been trained in a variety of important skills (e.g. ENT (Ear, Nose and Throat) and mental health care), rehabilitative surgery has been provided, referral systems have

been improved and strategic support has been given to make sure that facilities are available as close to children as possible. Access to quality health care is often restricted, simply because families cannot afford to travel to the services their children really need. We will support new partners in ensuring that young disabled people access appropriate, quality health care provision.

Social Participation

Stigmatisation, and the resulting lack of social participation, plays a major role in decreasing the opportunities available to young disabled people. With USDC Uganda we have tackled this at a variety of levels. Locally, communities have been sensitised using volunteers, groups of parents and radio shows. Meetings have been organised to make district officials aware of the needs of young disabled people. Nationally, USDC Uganda has engaged in a number of initiatives to improve understanding of the needs of young disabled people amongst the public and policy makers. A recent baseline survey shows that awareness has improved in all the districts where USDC has been working. We will support new partners to carry out activities which support the social participation and integration of young disabled people.

Families

Over the past five years we have been working with USDC Uganda to build the capacity of parents. They have been facilitated to form support groups to assist one another and their children. These groups have been established across all the focus districts and have been able to take on the implementation of a number of activities at community and district level, from the identification of young disabled people to the lobbying of district officials. This work has illustrated that parents both benefit from mutual support and are able to be positive and effective advocates for their children. We will support groups of parents who are committed to supporting and advocating for their young disabled people.

Employment Opportunities and Livelihoods

Inadequate access to education and health care combine to mean that disabled young people struggle to access employment opportunities and obtain a livelihood. Poverty amongst disabled young people is thereby exacerbated. As well as promoting access to education, with our help USDC Uganda has supported the government

in the refurbishment and management of two vocational training centres in Uganda. These centres offer disabled young people the chance to obtain skills to improve their chances in the job market. Whilst a number of African countries now have a policy of universal primary education, many young disabled people are unable to continue their education because of a lack of resources and of accessible and appropriate opportunities. We will work with new partners to help young disabled people as they become adults and to ease the often seriously difficult transition between childhood and an adult life for disabled young people in Africa.

Mainstreaming Gender and HIV/Aids

As well as encouraging the mainstreaming of disability, we also acknowledge the need to mainstream other issues into our own work with young disabled people. Many young disabled people are affected by the marginalisation of girls and young women and by the stigmatisation of people with a positive HIV diagnosis. We will ensure that we apply our values of equality, honesty and respect, and plan projects with due attention to gender and HIV/Aids concerns. From our work in Uganda, we know that young girls with disabilities are most often denied access to education and their reproductive rights are regularly violated. USDC Uganda has recently carried out lobbying activities to promote the education of disabled girls. It has undertaken to support parents in communicating sexual health messages to their young disabled people. It has also produced materials in a variety of formats to raise awareness about sexual health amongst young disabled people. We will continue to promote the reproductive rights and choices of girls, as well as boys, with disabilities and ensure that these issues are considered in every aspect of our work.

The values which will inform the way we work

Rights-based approach

Because we value the rights of young disabled people we are committed to a rights-based approach. We know that the rights of young disabled people are consistently being denied, that education and health systems fail them, that they are not allowed to participate fully in local life and that they are less likely than others to be able to access employment opportunities once they complete their education. A commitment to rights means sending a loud and clear message to everyone with whom we work that things must change. It means telling young disabled people, as well as their parents, about the rights they have and it means challenging government at all levels when those rights are denied. Because we take rights seriously, we also want to prioritise child safety.

Full Participation of Children and their Families

The full participation of young disabled people and their families means ensuring that we and our partners not only involve, but also accurately represent, the people with whom we work. It means ensuring good practice in terms of involving children and their families in consultation, planning, implementation and monitoring, and ensuring that our board is representative of the constituencies with whom we work. It also means recognising that children's rights may be compromised or denied by their parents as a result of over-protection or abuse, and hence the need to address these issues in all aspects of our work.

Strong and Positive Partnerships

We will build partnerships with organisations slowly and deliberately, so as to allow them the opportunity to tell us what they think and need. We will develop specific interventions and draft agreements together to ensure they reflect the needs of the partner organisation. Increasingly, over the next five years, we will develop mechanisms through which to involve our partners in the governance of the organisation.

Equality, Honesty and Respect

AbleChildAfrica will not discriminate on any grounds. Rather we will seek to be honest with, and respectful of, everyone with whom we work.

We will seek to ensure the full participation of groups who have faced discrimination because of their disability, gender or their national, local or self-defined identity. We will promote these values throughout our work.

Local Ownership and Leadership of Programmes

From USDC's experience in Uganda we have learned the positive potential of local leadership. We are committed to the growth of strong local organisations and will strive to ensure sustainability. We will not seek to be the sole supporter of partner organisations, but rather aim to support them in specific objectives and activities, which we believe can have a lasting effect on the lives of young disabled people. We will also support our partners to grow independently of us by helping to develop their resources and fundraising skills.

Measuring our Success

Success is measured not only by the number of people whose lives are changed and affected, but also by the quality of the change which is realised. Over the next five years we will develop a clear framework for measuring quality, which prioritises asking the people we work with what they think and recording how their lives have changed. We will also prioritise research and the gathering of information which can support our lobbying activities in order to seek longer-term and wider reaching change in the lives of young disabled people across the African continent.

Monitoring and evaluation will be a continuous process and will be based on the following key indicators:

- Changes in policy and practice
- Sustainable changes in the capacity of partners
- Improvement in the profile of AbleChildAfrica
- Extent and quality of the involvement of young disabled people
- Accessibility of information and effectiveness of quality and safety systems

These will help the Trustees to monitor the implementation of this strategic plan. The monitoring will be carried out through an annual planning and review process based on approved annual plans, the implementation of which will be monitored through yearly reviews with partners and staff.

Regular visits will be made to our African partners and we will work with each partner to develop a monitoring framework and a series of indicators for our work together. These local level indicators will be monitored through monitoring visits, quarterly reports, yearly reviews and external evaluations. We will also use reports from visits and meetings, and stories about individual children and young people as part of the monitoring process. Each year this information will be put together to form part of our annual impact report which we will share with partners and other stakeholders.

Notes

- 1 Based on the AU estimate that 10% of people living in Africa have a disability and the fact that over half the continent's population is under 18 years of age.
- 2 Action on Disability and Development
- 3 National Union of Disabled Persons (Uganda)
- 4 Article 7, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities www.un.org/disabilities
- 5 Article 23, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities www.un.org/disabilities
- 6 Article 32, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities www.un.org/disabilities
- 7 http://safod.org/African%20Decade/african_decade.html,
- 8 <http://www.who.int/disabilities/introduction/en/index.html>
- 9 There are also variations in the ways in which different organisations and writers classify disability due to varying legislation in different places, an emphasis on the medical, and problems with language and translation, as well as differing opinions on the breadth of what should be considered disabling. Disabled Peoples' International (DPI) recommends the International Classification of Functioning (ICF) which defines disability as "the outcome of the interaction between a person with an impairment and the environmental and attitudinal barriers he/she may face". AbleChildAfrica will adopt this definition.
- 10 For example: Sense International, Sightsavers
- 11 For example: CBM, Light for the World, Handicap International
- 12 For example: Save the Children, Terre des Hommes, Oxfam, Plan International, World Vision, VSO.
- 13 Under 18 years of age
- 14 18-25 years of age



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Working with disabled children and young people

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