

How can Disabled People's Organisations be involved in civil society platforms and ensure disability issues are included into decision-making processes?

Relevant articles of the CRPD: 9, 29

Country: Togo

Region: West Africa

Languages available: English, French

Advocacy of People with Disabilities for their Inclusion in the Civil Society Platform and for the Accessibility of Public Buildings in the Municipality of Dapaong

Description of the practice and the process involved

The city of Dapaong is located in the Savannah region, in northern Togo, about 650km from the capital Lomé. It has about 34,000 inhabitants. The region is among the poorest areas of the country, according to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Living conditions are very difficult, especially for people with disabilities.

The Organisation of Committed People with Disabilities of Tone (APHMOTO), which has 142 members with disabilities, is very active in the community. This organisation is involved in raising awareness and mobilizing disability organisations. Following the identification of 705 children with disabilities, it has initiated an inclusive education project in collaboration with an INGO. Advocacy actions have also been undertaken to include a specific line for DPOs in the municipal budget.

In 2005, the Support Programme for Civil Society Organisations (PAOSC) was created. This programme, supported by the European Union, aims to support all civil society organizations in Togo, including DPOs. This programme was expected to be implemented in all regions of Togo, including Dapaong, the administrative centre of the Savannah Region. The Federation of Development Organisations of the Savannah Region (FODES) was mandated to steer the programme in the Savannah region, where two main activities were planned: the construction of the Civil Society House, and the creation of the Regional Civil Society Platform.

At the start of the programme, briefing sessions were organized by FODES for associations and NGOs, including both members and non-members of the

Federation. APHMOTO was not a member of FODES but was invited to take part, alongside other organizations.

A few months later, during the preparatory phase of the installation of the Regional Civil Society Platform, the DPO was sidelined. The DPO engaged in lobbying and peaceful protests against what was considered to be a discriminatory decision, targeting the local Department of Social Action, resulting in the unconditional inclusion of APHMOTO within the Platform.

After several months of tough negotiations, the agreement to participate in the Platform was obtained. Following this success, an invitation was sent to APHMOTO to take part in the drafting of the charter to define the method of functioning and action of the Platform. During the drafting of the charter, six categories were selected by the Platform for action, namely women, corporate groups, NGOs, unions, religious/ spiritual organisations, and traditional chiefs. People with disabilities were once again excluded, under the pretext that they were already included in the section of religious groups and traditional chiefs. APHMOTO challenged this approach, saying that people with disabilities had very specific needs that other categories of the platform would not necessarily have the competence to identify and report.

After lengthy discussions, and following the lobbying done by APHMOTO with other groups, the meeting finally decided to increase the number of categories to seven, the seventh being 'Vulnerable Groups'. The aim of this group was to bring together NGOs involved in the fight against AIDS, providing assistance to child prisoners, widows and, of course, to people with disabilities.

A month later, the founding general assembly of the Platform was held and APHMOTO was mandated to be the organisation for the Vulnerable Groups component. Since then, this group has been one of the most effective and dynamic on the platform and has implemented many activities on the ground.

Among these actions, an inventory of inaccessible public buildings was carried out. Following this analysis, accessibility adaptations for eleven public buildings were prioritized. An advocacy plan was then developed in order to convince local authorities, including the Municipality Council, to take measures against this discriminatory situation. After a series of meetings, the municipal authorities acknowledged the facts and agreed to undertake remedial measures. But two major difficulties were mentioned: the disfigurement of the original architecture of the buildings and the lack of financial resources to undertake the work.

To solve the financial problem, APHMOTO worked out and submitted an accessibility project to the German Development Service (DED) for funding; DED recognized its relevance and agreed to fund it. With this agreement, the association appealed again to the Municipality Council for the authorization to conduct the work, which was given in a decision taken some time later. This process took three months. In addition to the authorization, the City Council delegated an officer to notify and inform the companies and offices concerned by the accessibility project.

The factors that made this practice possible

- The **dynamism** of the DPO, **the knowledge of their rights** and of the **local context** were crucial in the carrying out of this practice.

- **The sustained lobbying actions** undertaken by the DPO effectively influenced the decisions of local stakeholders.
- The **financial and technical support** of the German Development Service was fundamental for the process of **making public buildings accessible**.

Some of the difficulties encountered

- There was a difficulty in **considering a DPO as a fully-fledged civil society organisation**; this was a major obstacle in the process towards inclusion in the Regional Platform. This reluctance on the part of other stakeholders was overcome through **continuous awareness-raising and advocacy** conducted by members of the association.
- Regarding the **accessibility** part of the project, some services were in favour while others were totally opposed. In the face of this opposition, the DPO renewed its **lobbying of the relevant local authorities**, particularly the relevant ministries. The project was finally carried out and eleven services in the locality were made more accessible by the construction of 17 ramps. The total cost of the action was 980,000FCFA - less than 1,500 euros.

The effects / impact of the practice

The integration and effective participation of APHMOTO in the platform has **directly influenced the local environment**:

- The Vulnerable Groups section, as a result of APHMOTO's leadership, has now acquired a **profile in the community**. A **directory** of DPOs and NGOs working on the issues of disability and HIV/AIDS and assisting other vulnerable groups has been established. In addition, APHMOTO has **compiled texts of laws relating to the protection of vulnerable groups** (texts on the protection of children, people living with AIDS, prisoners, people with disabilities), which was **officially submitted** to the authorities of the five prefectures of the Savannah Region.
- APHMOTO's presence in the Platform has meant that **disability issues are better understood**, and indeed disability is **commonly the leading thematic issue addressed** by the Vulnerable Groups section. APHMOTO eventually aims to **preside** over the Platform in order to demonstrate the **leadership capacity** of people with disabilities.
- Members of the DPO and the community of Dapaong, including the elderly, have **improved access to public buildings**. Since then, **several other services** have **adapted their construction plans** in the interests of accessibility, including the Regional Hospital of Dapaong, and Civil Society House.
- **Other accessibility projects** have been developed by APHMOTO and are **awaiting funding**. This intervention has **raised the profile of APHMOTO**, which now has increased **respect and legitimacy** when working with local authorities. In turn, local authorities have **more knowledge** about disability and **regularly invite** APHMOTO to public meetings.

- *“Here in Dapaong and in the region, we are striving to promote the rights of people with disabilities. For us, becoming part of the Civil Society Platform and heading the «Vulnerable Groups» section was an opportunity to prove to non-disabled people that disability does not deprive people of their faculties or their capacity to act, react and interact socially. We will soon set in motion a strategy so that, at the next General Assembly of the platform, we can win the chair of the platform... and soon no one will ever say again that the people with disabilities are useless”* said APHMOTO Programmes Director.

An example of disability inclusion

Participating in the Civil Society Platform has enabled this DPO to integrate itself into the **network of development stakeholders** and to ensure that the **specific needs of people disabilities are taken into account**.

Related articles of the CRPD

The struggle of this DPO to be integrated into the Civil Society Platform in the Region is related to **Article 29** of the CRPD on the participation of persons with disabilities in public life and politics. The advocacy for accessibility is directly related to **Article 9** of the Convention on accessibility.

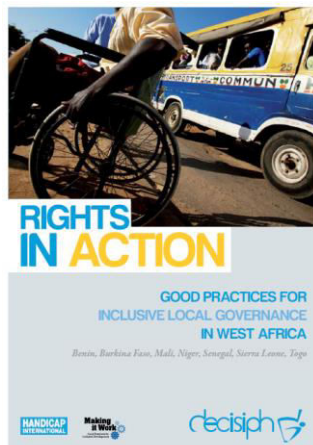
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Background and context



Full project report: [Rights in Action - Good Practices for Local Inclusive Governance in West Africa \(Handicap International 2010\)](#)

Criteria for the good practices: see pages 89 – 91 of the full report.

Recommendations from the good practices: see pages 98 – 111 of the full report.

Links to further resources:

[Full text on CRPD article 9 - Accessibility](#)

[Full text on CRPD article 29 – Participation in political](#)

[and public life](#)