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Only 10% of children with disabilities attend school

Ninety per cent of children with disabilities do not enjoy their rights to education, survival, development, protection and participation, according to a 2016 Unicef report.

The report shows that socio-cultural beliefs cause society to discriminate against those with disabilities, putting them at a disadvantage. For instance, such children struggle to access education in Uganda, especially in rural areas.

Despite an increase in pupils enrolled in primary schools, the report on the status of children in Uganda indicates inequalities in access for those with disabilities.

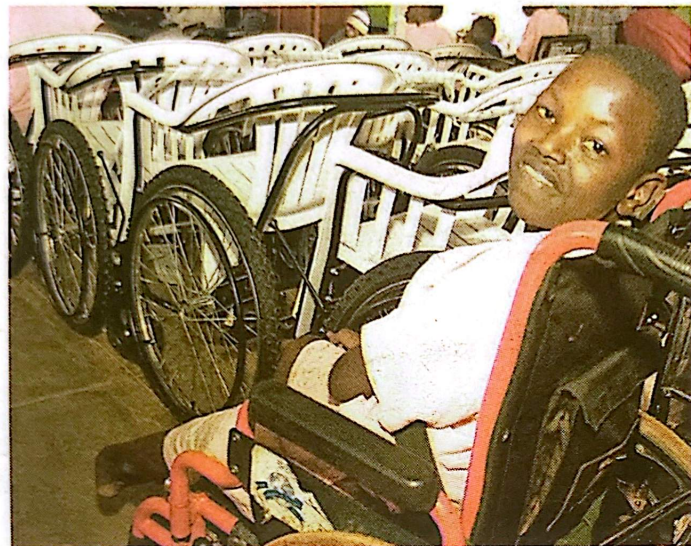
Christine Naddamba, a special needs teacher, says several parents are not interested in educating their children with disabilities, yet they deserve a chance to a bright future.

"As an empowerment right, education is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalised adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities," according to the Unesco Handbook on Right to Education for Children with Disabilities.

Education also plays a crucial role in maintaining social justice and equality of status and opportunity.

In cases where children with disabilities go to school, many of them are taken when they are older than the recommended age of six for Primary One.

"This is wrong. All parents must bring their children to school at the



There are 6,957 special needs pupils in Uganda, a report shows

right age," Joy Mwesigwa, the director of Kampala School for the Physically Handicapped, says.

"Delaying to take children to school affects their ability to learn. If taken early to school, children with disabilities learn fast, opening their career doors to a brighter future," she says.

Mwesigwa also notes that several parents do not know special needs schools exist and calls for sensitisation on them.

Dr Daniel Nkaada, the commissioner in charge for primary and basic education at the education ministry, says they are embarking on sensitising the public on the rights of children with disabilities.

"We have started vigorous campaigns on this area through refresher courses of teachers. The ministry is keen on promoting self-reliance among physically handicapped children through formal education and vocational training,

a move that will enable them live a good life," he explains.

Special care

One of the institutions that provide an education for children with disabilities is the Kampala School for the Physically Handicapped in Mengo, Kampala.

Established in 1969, the main objective of the learning centre is to improve the quality of life and rehabilitation of children with cerebral palsy.

The condition is a group of permanent movement disorders that appear in early childhood, caused by injury or abnormal development of the brain. Cerebral palsy affects body movement, muscle control, co-ordination, tone as well as posture and balance.

Mwesigwa, who is a teacher and expert in special needs, says: "Children with cerebral palsy can improve through rehabilitation, which promotes their development and self-reliance."

Her school has occupational therapists who work with the children to rehabilitate the children. The therapy has several activities, such as dexterity, sensorimotor, cognitive, hydrotherapy and social skills to enable the pupils become self-reliant.

Although more than half of the pupils at Kampala School for the

TOUGH REALITY

The National Development Plan 2014 shows that of the learners in school, 10% of them have disabilities.

However, access to an education tailored to their special needs is hampered by limited technical, human and financial resources.

The Education Sector Performance Report of 2016/2017 shows that there are 6,957 special needs pupils in school. Of these, 1,978 (28.4%) have hearing impairment followed by those that are mentally handicapped. In terms of gender, 3,939 (56.6%) of the special needs pupils are male, while the rest are female.

In addition, 4.1% of the learners fall in the special needs category of multiple handicaps (blind and impaired).

Most of the special needs schools are government-aided and all run under the universal primary education programme.

Physically Handicapped have cerebral palsy, the institution caters for other disabilities, including spina bifida, muscular dystrophy, polio, hydrocephalus and Down syndrome.

Last week, the Chinese Christian Church, in conjunction with Taizhou Chamber of Commerce in Uganda, donated items worth sh20m to the school, including wheelchairs, shoes, clothes, cups and plates.

Save the Children in