

## CHAPTER 11

# The Malawi Directory of Disability Organisations

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## SUMMARY

*There are many exciting and dynamic disability-focused groups and organisations active in Malawi, but sometimes, there are insufficient means and opportunities for groups to interact and collaborate. Whilst the impact of individual projects alone may be significant, the potential of utilising a collaborative approach is even greater. A well structured, cohesive and coordinated network is needed in each country to yield results far greater than the sum of individual parts. These networks can then collaborate throughout Africa to further strengthen service delivery, improve strategic planning and resource utilisation.*

*The "Directory of Disability Services in Malawi", aims to provide the information that might make this possible. It brings together in one document all the organizations, groups and services specifically working on disability issues in Malawi. Such a collation provides a tool for strengthening the network. The goal is to benefit persons with disabilities, their families, their communities and ultimately, the whole of society. This project reflects the aims of the CBR Africa Network and provides an example of what each country could do to facilitate information sharing and collaborative working.*

## INTRODUCTION

*"Mutu umodzisusenza denga"*  
*Chinyanja Proverb, Malawi*

The literal meaning of the proverb is, "One Head does not carry the roof meaning, "Come on! All hands on deck"! Co-operation, unity, and dependency are necessary and good. They lead to mutual benefit and synergy.

The Malawi directory initially grew out of frustrations arising from working in hospital wards and sending children with disabilities home, to face an uncertain future, knowing there were, or probably were, organisations 'out there', who could provide long term specialist help and support - yet not knowing how to access that support. Exploring the directory idea with key disability activists in Malawi, it soon also became apparent that the project was a direct and practical response to one of the four key challenges set at the Uganda 2001, CBR conference: "The need for CBR training and practice to be documented and synchronised both nationally and inter-continentially".

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES - WHY A DIRECTORY?

A directory can serve several purposes. The needs of three principal audiences were considered.

### 1. Persons with disabilities (PWDs) and their families

For people to benefit from the excellent work being done on so many areas and aspects of disability, they must be able to access the organisations and their programmes.

The directory's aim is to help inform service users:

**WHICH** organisation/programme; does **WHAT**; for **WHOM**

This makes it possible to identify and make informed choices about which organisation may be best able to help and support with a particular issue.

It is then important to know:

**WHERE** an organisation is located; **HOW** to access the services offered.

The purpose of a directory is to provide all this information both clearly and accessibly.

## 2. Those who work with PWDs

The first point of contact with support service providers for many PWDs is often a hospital, school, church, social welfare office, or other such general community institutions. It is essential that professionals and others working within such institutions are aware of the specialist services that are available to PWDs. The directory can then provide a reference that can be used, together with PWDs, to identify and access a suitable organisation to support with particular needs or issues.

## 3. Organisations (including international organisations)

Organisations listed within a directory reflect a large and rich range of specialist expertise, but:

- **No one organisation can fulfill all possible needs:**

Many individuals have multiple needs. It is essential for organisations to network, to coordinate services, to pool scarce resources, to work in a spirit of synergy and togetherness, rather than in atmosphere of competitiveness and unnecessary duplication of services. A directory is the first and crucial step towards such a network. It enables contacts to be made and information to be exchanged.

- **All organisations are evolving and continually improving:**

Through comparing and contrasting programmes and activities, organisations can learn from one another's successes and failures.

## METHODS USED TO COMPILE THE DIRECTORY

### Local ownership

For continuity, sustainability and long-term impact, local ownership of the directory project and tailoring objectives to local needs, is crucial.

The work was thus conducted in close collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Persons with Disabilities as the key local partner and eventual Malawian owner of the project. Other key organisations in Malawi's disability arena were also centrally involved: in particular, FEDOMA (Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi) and MACOHA (Malawi Council for the Handicapped).

### Identification of Disability Related Organisations

A 'snowballing' method was used to identify organisations. Starting with a small number of key informants and an existing (but limited in scope and detail), 4 year old directory, organisations were identified and contacted. Each in turn helped with information and contacts to identify yet more organisations.

### Visits and Organisational Profiles

To ensure a level of detail and engagement not possible via a remote/postal survey, personal visits were made to each organisation. Details about the directory project were, where possible, sent beforehand to enable preparation of any relevant information.

Each organisation was profiled through discussion with key project staff and beneficiaries. Core information was collected for publication:

- Name of organisation
- Contact details
- Organisation overview: Aims, Objectives and Mission Statement
- Background information
- Key activities
- Geographical area of work
- Notable successes and achievements
- Target beneficiary group (e.g., adult or child; type of disability)

During the visit, a qualitative survey was also carried out. Organisations' strengths; weaknesses; future plans and needs were discussed. Opinions on networking were also sought.

## OUTCOMES

### Printed directory

A paper version of the directory is currently being finalised. Initial dissemination will be to organisations themselves, to aid with their networking, planning, and developmental needs. Eventually, the hope is to also distribute to health centres, clinics, hospitals, schools and other important social "hubs".

### Internet directory

Aimed principally at the international/policy level audience, an internet-based version of the directory is also planned. Web linkages can grow exponentially, facilitating further sharing of knowledge and other resources. A copy of the directory is now available on the can web site: [www.afri-can.org](http://www.afri-can.org)

With even local organisations increasingly able to access computers, this will ease communications and enable both Malawi-specific and international "discussion forums". News, developments and notification of relevant events also could take place over web media.

### Long term updates and revision

To remain current and useful, the directory will need to be periodically updated. This is most easily done once there is a well accepted "starting format". Feedback and comments on the first edition must be actively sought and refinements made. With the initial work done through visits, updates will easily be possible via post and email, facilitating ease and speed of revisions.

## CONCLUSION

A directory of disability organisations and services is an important step in facilitating a national network of disability services in Malawi.

Programme impact and ultimate benefits to persons with disabilities can be maximised through organisations working together within a well co-ordinated network:

- Both individuals and professionals know which services are available and how to best access them
- Network coordinators can communicate with organisations and identify issues that need addressing - thereby best meeting the rights and needs of persons with disabilities
- Capacity building, mutual support and efficient use of resources is made possible

This project model is relevant and applicable to many other African countries.

## REFERENCES

CHAKANZA J. *Wisdom of the People: 2000 Chinyanja Proverbs: CLAIM* (Christian Literature Association of Malawi); 2000.