

# DISABILITY RIGHTS PROMOTION INTERNATIONAL

## Monitoring The Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities

### Country Report: Cameroon

#### **Conceptual framework and scope**

*Disability Rights Promotion International* is an international project aimed at establishing a system for monitoring disability rights across the globe, according to human rights norms and principles, particularly those advanced by the recently adopted UN *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

Country reports are based upon the *DRPI* research to monitor the status of rights of disabled people at two levels: systemic and individual. The systemic focus of the study reviews national and regional legislation on disability as well as case law, and government programmes and policy toward people with disability. On the basis of these analyses country reports present recommendations to improve the human rights situation of people with disabilities in every country monitored

#### **Systemic focus findings**

This study has found many gaps and limitations in systemic provisions to support the rights of persons with disabilities in Cameroon. As far as international law is concerned, and although Cameroon is party to a number of international human rights conventions, it has not yet signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Domestic provisions are also insufficient. For instance, there is no constitutional definition of disabilities. Law n° 3/013 of 21<sup>st</sup> July 1983 partially fills in this gap but the understanding of disability it puts forward reflects a deficit approach rather than framing disability as a social and human rights issue. This law forbids all forms of discrimination towards persons with disabilities but the measure has been criticised for its ambiguity and lack of enforcement leading to un-consistent practice. Although persons with disabilities as citizens are entitled under the constitution to all rights as any other citizen (including for example the right to vote) and in theory enjoy access to free secondary education and health services (though a special disability ID card), in practice their rights are severely limited by lack of physical accessibility, widespread ignorance about disability rights and lack of enforcement of anti-discrimination provisions in place. Although there exists in Cameroon since 2004 a national institution for the promotion and protection of human rights, including those of persons with disabilities - the National Commission on Human Rights and Freedoms - and a large number of organizations of people with disabilities, they have to date been unable to reverse this situation.

#### **Individual focus findings**

This section of the report is based upon 96 interviews with persons with disabilities conducted in three geographic regions: Bafoussam, Bamenda and Yaoundé. The study examined how the barriers and obstacles faced by people with disabilities affected their rights, by considering in particular four key human rights principles: **dignity** (perceptions of self-worth), **autonomy** (ability to make choices and decisions on issues that affect one's own life), **equality** (having disability differences respected and disadvantages addressed and being able to participate fully on equal terms), and **inclusion** (being recognized and valued as equal participants and having needs understood as integral to the social and economic order and not identified as special needs).

Interviewees overwhelmingly reported having encountered throughout their lives recurrent violations of their fundamental rights. These violations took place in different contexts: in the family, at school, in the workplace, and in the community/society in general, as well as in their relationships with public authorities.

Results show that incidences involving **disrespect for difference, inequality, and violation of dignity are more typical** than experiences of access to and exercise of these human rights principles. In fact, about 73 % of persons with disabilities interviewed reported experiences where their sense of dignity as human beings had been eroded; another 25.0 % of the respondents reported having received unequal treatment by non-disabled persons in the family, in the community, at work, at school and even in some cases by public authorities; finally, more than 53 % of the respondents reported having been labelled and given negative nicknames on the basis of their disability.

Experiences of discrimination appear to be rooted in pervasive stereotypes and misconceptions about disability and the social beliefs that prevail in Cameroonian society, which operate to discredit persons with disabilities by generally associating disability with incapacity. Nevertheless, positive experiences of inclusion and self-determination were also reported by about 40% of the respondents.

## **Conclusions & Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following seven recommendations to improve the human rights situation of persons with disabilities in Cameroon were advanced:

### **1. Raising Awareness**

The State and disabled people organizations should better educate the public on issues related to persons with disabilities as well as on disability as a human rights issue.

### **2. Improve/ amend legislation**

The government should speed up its plans to revise and render more coercive the disability law of 1983 and its decree of application of 1990. In particular,

appropriate measures should be taken in order to enforce the law and ensure sanctions and reparations in case of violations of the rights of persons with disabilities.

### **3. Improve respect for disability rights in public service**

The government should be at the forefront in drawing the attention of the public concerning the respect for persons with disabilities. In order to achieve this, social personnel should be better trained on their responsibilities towards persons with disabilities and on their rights.

### **4. Improve social supports**

Measures to improve the living conditions and income of persons with disabilities and their families should be implemented, particularly in the areas of transportation, housing, health and employment.

### **5. Political representation**

Measures should be taken to ensure greater representation of persons with disabilities in most national legal institutions such as the parliament, and other state bodies and institutions.

### **6. Economic Assistance**

The government should improve the financial assistance to organizations of people with disabilities, notably through the establishment of a National Solidarity Trust fund.

### **7. Solidarity among persons with disabilities**

People with disabilities need to come together and in solidarity fight for their rights in the Cameroonian society.