



SAFOD
Southern Africa
Federation of the Disabled



SOUTHERN AFRICA DISABILITY ROUNDTABLE FORUM

**JUNE 20-23, 2017, HOLIDAY INN,
JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA**

**“Reflecting on 30 years of Disability Advocacy
& Activism in Southern Africa”**



I. TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. ACRONYMS	1
II. FOREWORD	2
III. ABOUT SAFOD	4
IV. EVENT STRUCTURE AND SUMMARY OF ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS	6
1.0 OPENING CEREMONY	11
1.1 Chairperson SAFOD: Mrs. Rachel Kachaje	11
1.2 Director General of SAFOD: Mr. Mussa Chiwaula	12
1.3 Secretary General of FFO: Ms Lilly Ann Elvestad	13
1.4 Social Development Deputy Minister in South Africa: Ms. Hendrietta Ipeleng Bogopane-Zulu	14
2.0 MAIN CONFERENCE THEMES	15
2.1 Tracking the work of the SAFOD affiliates over the past 30 years of disability activism	15
2.2. Tracking disability movement in Southern Africa; 30 years of activism	18
2.3 Assessing implementation of key AU disability plans and UN disability frameworks	20
2.4 Tracking the financial mechanisms of disability work in Southern Africa	20
2.4.1 Disability financing	21
2.4.2 UNFPA SRHR programme	22
2.4.3 Experiences in funding for DPOs	23
2.5 Tracking and assessing the involvement of and the role of private sector and trade unions in inclusive employment over the past 30 years	23
2.6 Creating early childhood inclusive environments and/or practices	25
2.7 Disability and Development Research	26
2.8 Raising a case for the SADC disability protocol	27
2.9 Panel Debate:	28
3.0 SIDE EVENTS	30
4.0 CONCLUSION	32

II. ACRONYMS

ADA:	Africa Disability Alliance
ADF:	Africa Disability Forum
AT-Info-Map:	Assistive Technogym Information Mapping Project
AU:	African Union
BOFOD:	Botswana Federation of Disabled People
CAN:	CBR Africa Network
CBID:	Community Based Inclusive Development
CBR:	Community Based Rehabilitation
DIDRR:	Disability in Disaster Risk Reduction
DPI:	Disabled People International
DPO:	Disabled Peoples Organization
DPSA:	Disabled People South Africa
DSD:	Department of Social Development
ECDE:	Early Childhood Development and Education
FAMOD:	Forum of Associations of Disabled People in Mozambique
FAPED:	Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Angola
FEDOMA:	Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi
FODPZ:	Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Zimbabwe
FODSWA:	Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Swaziland
JICA:	Japan International Cooperation Agency
LCS:	Living Conditions Studies
LNFOOD:	Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled
MDGs:	Millennium Development Goals
NAD:	Norwegian Association of Disabled
NFPDN:	National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia
NORAD:	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
REC:	Regional Executive Council (of SAFOD)
SADC:	Southern Africa Development Community
SAE4D:	South African Employers for Disability
SAFOD:	Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled
SATUCC:	Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council
SDGs:	Sustainable Development Goals
SRHR:	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
SRP:	SAFOD Research Programme
UNCRPD	United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA:	United Nations Population Fund
WHO:	World Health Organization
YPWD:	Young Persons with Disabilities
ZAFOD:	Zambia Federation of Disabled

III. FOREWORD

Organized by the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD), the Southern Africa Disability Round Table Forum brought together various disability actors from June 20 to 23, 2017 at Holiday Inn Airport, Johannesburg, South Africa, with overall aim of reflecting and evaluating the work of SAFOD and the disability movement over the past three decades. This was the first regional roundtable forum organized by SAFOD, and hence historic. The intention of SAFOD was to use the platform as a springboard to begin more regular, consistent and meaningful engagement with different stakeholders within the disability sector in the region to advance the agenda of disability mainstreaming and inclusive development. For this reason, the intention of SAFOD was to make the forum a triennial event.

I am humbled to report that the 2017 forum turned out to be very successful to the extent that the delegates did not hesitate to support and formally endorse the idea of making the forum to be held on triennial intervals. In this context, the next forum is expected to be held in 2020.

Running under the theme “*Reflecting on 30 years of Disability Advocacy & Activism in Southern Africa*”, the 2017 Roundtable Forum sought to create a regional platform where various stakeholders in the disability sector could reflect upon the achievements or milestones during the 30-year period; discuss the challenges which had been experienced throughout the same period; and dialogue on how delegates, including development partners, could effectively support both SAFOD and the entire disability sector in sustaining the gains that had been made so far.

The Roundtable Forum also contributed towards shaping the strategic direction of not only SAFOD but the entire disability movement in the region, shaping both the organization's new five-year Strategic plan as well as the approach towards achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Disability Roundtable Forum was part of the anniversary commemorations of SAFOD which clocked 30 years in 2016.

Coincidentally, this was a significant year as the new SDGs had just replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MGDs) which were devoid of disability indicators; the UNCRPD had just clocked 10 years; and SAFOD, being the only credible network of national federations of DPOs in SADC, had just began implementing its Strategic Plan.

The forum played a significant role in raising awareness about disability main streaming among donor agencies and other key partners who discussed how they could effectively integrate disability within their various programs in the region. This was achieved not only through the presentations, keynote address/speeches and deliberations during the main event, but also through a

number of side events that were organized to provide more insights on issues affecting the disability sector in the region. The side events focused on assistive technology in the region organized by SAFOD and its partners the University of Washington and AfriNEAD; disability mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction organized by Federation of the Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA) and its partner NAD; and community based inclusive development organized by the CBR Africa Network (CAN) and its partner CBM.

On the evening of the June 23, 2017 SAFOD climaxed the event by organizing a Gala Dinner to honour disability activists for their outstanding contributions over the period of 30 years in each of the ten countries where SAFOD currently operates. The **Southern Africa Disability Champions Awards** is an initiative to sustain activism and advocacy for the mainstreaming of disability within SADC. SAFOD also presented **Private Sector Excellence Awards** in recognition of private sector entities that had demonstrated disability inclusiveness.

Key issues and recommendations – touching on research, advocacy, capacity-building of DPOs, networking and collaboration among different stakeholders, just to mention a few – have been articulated in this forum report. We invite you to read the summary of issues and recommendations in the next Chapter of this report. You can learn even more about what was deliberated throughout the forum in the subsequent chapters.

This report is also available in PDF on the forum website: <http://www.disabilityroundtable.org>. Feel free to download and share. On this website, you can also download almost all the presentations; the speeches and keynote address; pictures, and some videos.

It is my wish that if you attended the 2017 forum, you will be inspired to attend the next event in 2020; if you did not, well, you have another chance to contribute, learn and network with various amazing individuals that will be gracing the event once again.

Since this was the first event of this nature, we trust that we will make the next event even better; even more interesting; and even more impactful. This is so because we believe in learning from experience to improve on our work.

On behalf of the Regional Executive Council (REC) of SAFOD, the SAFOD Secretariat, and the entire membership, and on my own behalf, I look forward to seeing you at the next Southern Africa Disability Round Table Forum, in 2018.



Mrs. Rachel Kachaje
SAFOD CHAIRPERSON

IV. ABOUT SAFOD

Who we are

The Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD) is a leading Southern African disability-focused network engaged in coordination of activities of organisations of Persons with Disabilities in the Southern Africa region. The organisation was formed in 1986 by persons with disabilities as a federation of Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs) with a strong presence in 10 countries. In each of these countries, we coordinate our programs and activities through our national affiliates, as follows:

1. Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Angola (FAPED);
2. Botswana Federation of Disabled People (BOFOD);
3. Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled (LNFOD);
4. Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA);
5. Forum of Associations of Disabled People in Mozambique (FAMOD);
6. National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia (NFPDN);
7. Disabled People South Africa (DPSA);
8. Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Swaziland (FODSWA);
9. Zambia Federation of Disabled (ZAFOD); and
10. Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Zimbabwe (FODPZ).

Our Mission

"To advocate for the rights of Persons with Disabilities as well as nurturing and strengthening its affiliates and other stakeholders in Southern Africa to ensure promotion of inclusive development and human rights for persons with disabilities."

Our Slogan

SAFOD operates under the following motto: "Unlocking an Inclusive Society for Persons with Disabilities in Southern Africa."

Our Vision

"An inclusive society where Persons with Disabilities are treated with dignity, respect and on the basis of equality."

What we do

SAFOD has successfully implemented activities and programmes, delivering on its mission of strengthening DPOs in SAFOD member countries through training, research, coordination, information-sharing, promotion of human rights and stimulating persons with disabilities' political and social development.

Where we work

Currently, we coordinate our programs and activities through our national affiliates in 10 countries within the Southern Africa region. In each of these countries, our focus is mainly to strengthen the capacity of our affiliates so that they are able to effectively advocate for the rights of the persons with the disabilities in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD); lobby for inclusive policies and programs; and many other activities. You can view the geographical locations of our affiliates and the activities they are involved in.

Our Programmes

In November 2014, SAFOD held the Strategic Planning Retreat in South Africa as part of a consultative process to seek input the new five-year Strategic Plan for 2015-2019. During the meeting, the 10 core programs that SAFOD had been implementing in the past were reviewed and reduced to eight flagship programs that guide all the operations of the organization.

It is important to note that the new list of the eight programs was not comprehensively altered from the one that was there prior to the current Strategic Plan, except that a number of programs had been revisited by way of renaming or rephrasing to incorporate new strategies, ideas and approaches, while others had been merged in a bid to reposition SAFOD more strategically.

The current programs are as follows:

1. Southern Africa Capacity and Institutional Building Strategy (SA-CIBIS)
2. Southern Africa Program on Inclusive Policies, Legislation and Justice (SA-IPLJ)
3. Southern Africa Disability Research, Documentation & Learning Centre (SA-DRDLC)
4. The Southern Africa Program on Inclusive Access to Health Care Services (SA-PAIHCCARE)
5. Southern Africa Disability Economic Empowerment and Entrepreneurship Program (SA-DEEEP)
6. Southern Africa Disability and Gender Mainstreaming Program (SA-DGMP)
7. Southern Africa Inclusive Education Program (SA-IEP)
8. Southern Africa Development Program for Children and Youth with Disabilities (SA-DCYD)

V. EVENT STRUCTURE AND SUMMARY OF ISSUES/RECOMMENDATIONS

The Southern Africa Disability Round Table Forum was a three-and-half day's event that was structured in such a way that it was generally organized around a theme – “*Reflecting on 30 years of Disability Advocacy & Activism in Southern Africa*” – and selected sub topics. The main theme was determined through a consultative process with between and SAFOD Secretariat and Regional Executive Council (REC) SAFOD affiliates and other key stakeholders within the disability sector in the region.

The forum tackled various aspects of the disability mainstreaming in the region through structured presentations, speeches and keynote address, open discussions, panel debate, and side events by SAFOD partners. All the proceedings of the main forum were organized based on the following sessions:

1. Tracking the work of the SAFOD affiliates over the past 30 years of disability activism
2. Tracking the Disability Movement in Southern Africa; 30 years of activism
3. Assessing implementations of Key AU Disability Plans and UN Disability Frameworks
4. Tracking the Financing Mechanisms of Disability Work in Southern Africa over the past three decades
5. Tracking & assessing the involvement & role of the private sector and trade unions in Inclusive Employment over the past 30 years
6. Session 7: Creating Early Childhood Inclusive Environments and/or Practices
7. Session 8: Disability & Development Research
8. Raising a Case for the SADC Disability Protocol
9. Enhancing the role of SAFOD, the entire disability sector, donors and private sector towards achieving sustainable and inclusive development in the region

All presentations within each session was allocated 45 minutes each. Each session was followed by plenary which allowed delegates provide feedback on what was presented or discussed in the presentations, raise and discuss issues freely, and, where possible, propose solutions to some of the specific challenges that were identified either by the presenters or the delegates themselves. Three key formal endorsements/resolutions that were made during the forum included:

1. Delegates endorsed the proposal for the formation of a more independent platform of different stakeholders to support SAFOD in driving the campaign for the SADC Disability Protocol forward so that the process becomes even more credible and owned by various stakeholders beyond just SAFOD and its national affiliates.
2. Delegates endorsed SAFOD's proposal to expand its constituency from the current ten countries in the SADC region where the organization works, to all the 15 SADC member countries to ensure that its work strategically impacts the region. However, caution must be taken to ensure that the motivation to expand is indeed informed by the strategic need rather than mere selfish or egoistic ambitions, and must be implemented within the reasonable capacity of the organization.
3. Delegates endorsed the proposal to hold the regional disability roundtable forum at least once every three years in order to create an opportunity to follow up on some of the key issues, recommendations and resolutions reached at each forum. This would prevent the forum turning into another talk shop where stakeholders discuss and agree on many issues which never get to be implemented in the absence of a mechanism to follow them up during sequent forums. In addition, the triennial events would also allow for more consistent engagements or dialoguing among various stakeholders, especially at this moment when different stakeholder must begin to account and engage more with the newly introduced Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The following was a summary of the key issues and recommendations that emanated from the proceedings of the forum:

1. SAFOD should strategically work with its affiliates towards maximising Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) opportunities more so the SADC disability Protocol, leveraging on the gains made so far with regards to gaining entries to SADC.
2. SAFOD should capacitate affiliates and other non-member DPOs to be able to carry out continuous advocacy to ensure Governments are domesticating the UNCRPD and are becoming more disability sensitive.
3. SAFOD should be able to find ways of supporting or capacitating its national affiliates to be able to effectively advocate for the rights of Persons with disabilities.

4. There is need for increased in-country networking and collaboration among DPOs within the region in order to manage the increasing number of DPOs that are emerging, as each DPO or each network of DPOs was lobbying individually and duplicating services. International development partners and other donors could help sponsor networking forums/platforms involving all DPOs in each country where they can exchange information, document the work they do, and explore the best way they can complement one another.
5. International development partners (donors) should also consider funding national seminars of all DPOs not only to advance collaboration as stated above, but to also enable them (the donors) understand who is doing what before they commit any resources.
6. SAFOD and its affiliates should develop and implement strategies towards advocating for inclusive national policies related to disaster management.
7. DPOs themselves should be well sensitized and capacitated to be able to influence conducive policies related to DIDRR and provide the necessary help/advise on designing sound programmes on the ground.
8. SAFOD and its affiliates should develop and implement strategies towards advocating for increased access of Assistive Technology in the region, to ensure improved quality of life in general of persons with disabilities.
9. SAFOD should help Persons with disabilities and their DPOs to become more innovative in the way they advocate for their rights related to labour and employment, including the new laws and policies that can guarantee more legal protection in the face of the new “World Order of Work.”
10. SAFOD should play a proactive role in building the governance systems of national affiliates, including strengthening accountability systems related to finance/resource management of funding that they receive from international donors and partners.
11. There is need for continuous engagement with government politicians in some of the SAFOD affiliated countries to ensure the rights of Persons with disabilities were promoted, especially in Botswana where the UNCRPD was not yet ratified.
12. There is need to enhance advocacy within the region towards the recognition of sign language as an official language, as a prerequisite for legal protection for the hearing impaired.

13. SAFOD, Governments and other stakeholders should work towards changing discriminatory and/or negative beliefs (mainly affecting Persons with albinism) in communities within the region, more especially in Mozambique and Malawi. Such beliefs have been behind the killings of the many persons with albinism, and have caused the marginalization of other Persons with disabilities even further.
14. SAFOD Should work with its affiliates in designing programmes that empower Persons with disabilities through their DPOs to be able to monitor national budgets and challenge some of the budgetary allocations to certain developmental sectors if the allocations are not responsive to the needs of Persons with disabilities.
15. Governments, international development partners, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should ensure that disability financing entails that adequate resources are mobilized, pooled and allocated efficiently to disability services and support programme to enable achievement of positive outcomes.
16. The disability movement should now push to tackle the root causes of poverty under the SDGs. Special focus should be placed on disability goals including; Poverty, Education, Economic growth and employment, Reducing inequality, Social inclusion, Inclusive cities, and Monitoring.
17. DPOs, donors, Governments and other strategic stakeholders should aim to empower Persons with Disabilities in the political arena, where they can increasingly and better represent themselves in national Parliaments.
18. SAFOD should increasingly utilise the existing research on the living conditions of Persons with disabilities in the region to inform policy and programming both nationally and regionally, and influence the promotion of inclusive development. SAFOD, therefore, need to develop disability research agenda.
19. SAFOD should pursue the need for a Disability Resource Centre in southern Africa, as identified by the LCS aims, and initiate ongoing high-level research and monitoring capacity as a partnership with DPOs.
20. Additionally, the need to involve Persons with disabilities in research was seen as critical in finding appropriate solutions to their problems because they can understand their issues better than researchers without disability. The key success of the LCS, which is the inclusion and participation by Persons with disabilities in research, should be celebrated and highlighted in the form of policy briefs which could be disseminated in Norway and further afield
21. SAFOD should support its affiliate DPOs to be able to leverage on the work of multiple implementers and partners through partnerships, but with strong coordination and clear division of labour, in order to maximise on the existing funding opportunities.

22. Governments, private sector and other relevant stakeholders should find ways and strategies of creating opportunities for employing Persons with disabilities, through sharing of best practices, and continuously building a business case for employing Persons with disabilities, among other things.
23. Governments, private sector and other strategic stakeholders should embark on enhanced collaboration with SAFOD or the disability movement at large to promote and provide space for perspectives of Persons with disabilities within trade union movements in light of decent work; to foster close collaboration between the trade union and the disability movement in SADC; and to ensure that trade unions services are accessible and relevant to workers/Persons with disabilities.
24. SAFOD should empower DPOs and other community structures to be able to enhance the strategic involvement of parents of children with disabilities as key to the success of Early Childhood Development and Education (ECDE) within the region.
25. SAFOD should work in close collaboration with DPOs, mainly at community levels, to intensify awareness among community members, traditional leaders, and other stakeholders regarding early identification of children with disabilities.

1.0 OPENING CEREMONY

Highlights of the Keynote Speakers:

1.1 Chairperson SAFOD: Mrs. Rachel Kachaje

In her opening speech, the chairperson of the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD), Mrs Rachel Kachaje, did not only welcome all delegates to the forum but also highlighted the significance of the Roundtable Forum. She said this was one of those rare and/or special days when Disabled Peoples Organizations (DPOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), academia, independent researchers, Government representatives, the private sector and other key sectors, were interacting among themselves over a very critical issue of disability rights and mainstreaming.

She stressed that the event provided the opportunity to the delegates to reflect on where they – as a disability sector – are coming from over the past 30 years, where they had gone wrong, what they would have done better, and how they should move forward.

In this regard, she encouraged the participants to express themselves as much as possible, so that together they could chart a way forward in terms of how they were going to best confront many issues affecting persons with disabilities in the region.

The Roundtable Forum was noted as significant to the wellbeing of Persons with disabilities and DPOs with regards to aspects of disability mainstreaming in the SADC region. For long Persons with disabilities had been left to the periphery of development.

Whereas the Legal Frameworks exist such as United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), SDGs, and the African Union Continental Plan of Action for African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2010-2019), conditions of Persons with disabilities continue to remain appalling.

She therefore acknowledged that SAFOD with support from her development partners were interested in finding innovative ways of promoting the rights of Persons with disabilities. The forum was just one of the many ways this would be achieved, making it part of the SADC development agenda.

In this context, she stressed that SAFOD was committed to research on issues such as perceptions of intellectual disability in African Context, Access to education and health care, provision of rehabilitation services, among others.

Promotion of the SADC Protocol on the Rights of Persons with disabilities in order to guide policy and decision making at both national and SADC levels

was thus critical to disability mainstreaming. SADC countries therefore needed to urgently ratify the UNCRPD and its optional protocol and domesticate as well as ensure effective enforcement. This could only be possible with support from development partners such as Norwegian Federation of Organisations of Disabled People (FFO), African Disability Forum (ADF), and Government of South Africa, among other stakeholders.

1.2 Director General of SAFOD: Mr. Mussa Chiwaula

In his welcoming remarks the Director General SAFOD, Mr. Mussa Chiwaula, said the Roundtable Forum whose theme was; *“Reflecting on 30 years of disability advocacy and Activism in Southern Africa,”* was an opportunity for Disabled People Organizations (DPOs), Academia, Researchers, Governments, private sector and civil society to re-think disability inclusion.

In particular, he highlighted that the event would provide an opportunity for the stakeholders in determining what worked, what did not work, how best to improve.

He outlined the following objectives of the forum;

- ❖ Providing opportunity to share lessons, challenges and best practices
- ❖ Celebrate achievements during the 30 years while creating opportunities for donor support to sustain the achievements.
- ❖ Contribute towards shaping the strategic direction of SAFOD and the entire disability movement in the region in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- ❖ Raise awareness about disability mainstreaming among the donor community.
- ❖ Explore ways through which civil society, DPOs, Researchers, Private sector, government and other stakeholders could strengthen current best practices.
- ❖ Examine how local civil society and International NGOs cooperated in the past and build on what worked well for the future.

Considering that such forums were not at all common in the region – with this one probably being the one of a kind – he therefore concluded his remarks by urging all delegates to seize the opportunity tenaciously and cherish it so much as if it would never arise again for eternity; and to give it their best attention as if it was their last attempt to put the interests of persons with disabilities on the top of the agenda, both nationally and regionally. He cautioned that there would be no excuse for squandering the opportunity!

1.3 Secretary General of FFO: Ms Lilly Ann Elvestad

In her Keynote address, Ms Lilly Ann Elvestad, Secretary General of Funksjonshemmedes Fellesorganisasjon (FFO), expressed delight to participate during the event in which SAFOD had once again demonstrated that the organization was taking shape.

“Today we are very proud of SAFOD! To gather all of you, to appreciate achievements and to have the ambition to shape a strategic direction in the future – that is something that we are proud to be part of as a donor,” Ms Lilly Ann Elvestad told the delegates.

She said FFO had partnered with SAFOD since 1999. As a partner, FFO was more than happy to be part of a history shaping the future of SAFOD, recalling that when SAFOD was down in 2012 and 2013, FFO had an extensive evaluation carried out to see if there was anything left to build on in the future. The evaluation research – which was to be presented later during the forum by the consultant Nyameka Mqikela – found that the affiliates counted on SAFOD for support and guidance. The owners were clear on the added value of SAFOD.

She therefore believed that the forum served to confirm the findings of the evaluation research on the relevance of SAFOD among its affiliates – as more than often they rely on SAFOD for guidance and support.

She revealed that even the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) which is the main donor of FFO, had acknowledged and praised FFO for standing by SAFOD in the crisis that followed after the passing away of its former Director General, the late Director General Alexander Phiri.

FFO, therefore, was cognizant of the concerns of the disability movement— poverty, Lack of equity, discrimination, lack of participation in development processes, etc. The most disheartening bit was that while most countries had good policies and laws, the implementation remained inadequate. The current achievements like gaining entries to SADC should not be taken for granted. It was high time SAFOD strategically worked with its affiliates towards maximising SADC opportunities, more so supporting the advocacy towards the draft SADC Disability Protocol. She commended SAFD for taking a strategic choice to move the office to Botswana - where the secretariat of SADC is situated.

She emphasised on utilising the existing research on the living conditions of Persons with disabilities in the region. This, in addition to the provisions of the UNCRPD, should be able to effectively promote inclusive development in the SADC region.

1.4 Social Development Deputy Minister in South Africa: Ms. Hendrietta Ipeleng Bogopane-Zulu

Ms. Hendrietta Ipeleng Bogopane-Zulu, Deputy Minister for Social Development of the republic of South Africa, was among the distinguished guests at the Regional Disability Round Table Forum. She had been invited to become the Guest of Honour to officially open the event. Due to other unforeseen commitments beyond her control, she was not able to come on the opening day. However, due to her passion for disability issues, she managed to avail herself on the second day of the event.

In her address, she acknowledged SAFOD's commitment to mainstreaming disability in the region, in particular for choosing South Africa to host the event which, she said, was an honour her office and the entire ministry. She noted that the fact that SAFOD has invited her to become a Guest of Honour was an encouraging gesture and vote of confidence for the work that she and her ministry were doing to advance the rights of persons with disabilities not only in South Africa but across the region as well.

She recalled that the struggle for liberation of persons with disabilities began from the apartheid era when their rights were not recognised. She actively participated in the struggle during those days, fought for her rights and those of others even after she became minister. She, therefore, described the event as one of her most extraordinary moments, as it brought fond memories of her activism when the disability movement was just beginning to grow a couple of decades ago.

She noted that the forum had, for the first time in a long time, re-united with old folks across the region, and expressed her excitement to have met, once again, activists like Mr. Joshua Malinga, Mrs. Rachel Kachaje, Mr. Kudakwashe Dube, and several others. In this context, she felt the theme for the event was perfectly befitting as she argued it was indeed high time the disability sector needed to reflect on the gains and challenges.

She, however, expressed her disappointment that since the struggles of South Africa veterans such as the late Mr. Friday Mavuso in South Africa, a high number of persons with disabilities in the country and across the region were still economically disempowered, living in abject conditions. While some positive strides were being made by some Governments at policy level to try to address some of the challenges, the battle was far from being won. The forum, therefore, could not have come at a better moment.

She, therefore, urged the participants to critically reflect on the challenges, to explore sustainable solutions that could help Governments and other stakeholders to come up with tangible interventions that focus on empowering persons with disabilities in the region economically and socially. She expressed interest to continue collaborating with SAFOD at regional level, and promised to meet SAFOD at a separate meeting in due course to explore more ways of collaborating with her ministry.

2.0 MAIN CONFERENCE THEMES

2.1 Tracking the work of the SAFOD affiliates over the past 30 years of disability activism

At least ten SAFOD affiliates made presentations giving evidence on how their work was impacting on the lives of Persons with disabilities; socially, economically and politically. Most presentations focused on policy advocacy, empowerment and inclusive development. Experiences were shared from affiliate countries of SAFOD including; Zambia, Angola, Malawi, South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. Nearly all the presentations focused on the success of the disability movement in the respective countries.

In Swaziland, it was noted that the issues affecting Persons with disabilities were not being prioritised by the Government because of poor negative attitude of the government officials. Even the UNCRPD was not yet domesticated hence making it difficult for the movement to hold government accountable. Continuous advocacy by the Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Swaziland (FODSWA) – the official national affiliate of the SAFOD – was thus recommended to ensure government became disability sensitive. It was further recommended that SAFOD should be able to support in advocating for the rights of Persons with disabilities in Swaziland.

In Zimbabwe, the disability movement had been able to advocate for the adoption of sign language as one of the national languages. Accessibility issues had also been addressed. Participants however, resolved that the Federation of Organisations of Disabled People in Zimbabwe (FODPZ) – the official national affiliate of SAFOD – ought to intensify advocacy for the implementation of the existing policy framework no matter how bad the policies could be. Often, political situations had implications on the success level of disability activists. Zimbabwe's political situation was cited as unfavourable to the growth of disability work. For instance, because of the bad leadership in Zimbabwe most donors such as DANIDA, Finland, etc., had withdrawn funding.

Namibia, however, reported several successes including signing and ratification of the UNCRPD in 2007; the successful advocacy by DPOs for sign language where TV stations had sign language interpreters; and other policy frameworks like the Disability Council Act 2004, Sector Inclusive Education 2014 and Human Rights Action Plan with proposed Amendment of the Constitution. The National Federation of People with Disabilities in Namibia (NFPDN) – which is the official national affiliate of SAFOD – had also been able to advocate for the appointment of Persons with disabilities at the National Assembly and elevation of disability department from the ministry of social services to the Office of the President.

In South Africa, the disability movement had been able to influence the signing of the UNCRPD. This had since changed the situation of Persons with disabilities. Unlike before, the Government was a little more responsive to disability concerns. Initially, the education was exclusive because the political arm was not willing to adjust but that had since changed. Persons with disabilities were now being absorbed in Government's key positions. Persons with disabilities were represented in University councils. The Employment Equity Act was in place. The enactment of Business Entrepreneur Preferential Procurement Act was also empowering Persons with disabilities to gain access to employment opportunities. Education of Children with disabilities was also being addressed under the white paper which was providing for inclusive education. The percentage number of Persons with disabilities accessing employment in both private and Government had increased from 2% to 7%. Government was providing incentives to companies employing Persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, though even with the above incentives Persons with disabilities in South Africa had limited access to employment because the majority lacked adequate qualifications since majority of Persons with disabilities previously had limited access to education.

There were, however, plans in South Africa to ensure more Persons with disabilities to gain access to employment. For instance, the disability movement was pushing for the companies to start educating at least five children with disabilities who in turn would be absorbed as employees in the respective companies. While there were gains registered by the disability movement, it was noted that disability and racism remained a challenge. There was also a concern that the increased number of DPOs emerging might affect the gains registered so far by the disability movement since this development was leading to lack of coordination as each DPO or each network of DPOs was lobbying individually and duplicating services. Some were in conflict with the umbrella organisation-the Disabled People South Africa (DPSA), which was the official affiliate of SAFOD in South Africa.

The situation in Botswana was reported to be disheartening with many Persons with disabilities having their rights abused. There was limited awareness on the rights of Persons with disabilities. Marginalisation was still at the peak. Children with disabilities were still locked up in houses with rural communities being affected the most. The Botswana Federation of the Disabled (BOFOD) – the official national affiliate of SAFOD – was, however, working with the University of Botswana to help improve the situation. SAFOD was also helping in promoting the rights of Persons with disabilities in the country through capacity building of the disability movement.

The need for continuous engagement of government politicians in Botswana to ensure the rights of Persons with disabilities were promoted was critically recommended. Persons with disabilities further ought to demand for social protection services.

In Angola, the Angolan Federation of Associations of Disabled People (FAPED) – an official affiliate of SAFOD – reported that there were 250,000 persons with disabilities in the country, according to official estimates. The Movement of Persons with Disabilities in Angola, had been active for 77 years. After the country's Independence, this Movement was led by former military personnel who contracted injuries due to armed conflict, hence the Government created the then Secretary of State of the Former Combatants. It was further learnt that in the 90's, SAFOD invited an Angolan Delegation that participated in the SAFOD General Assembly and directed the Delegation to create a Federation of Disabled Associations of Angola. In December 2000, FAPED was created, which brought together 26 member associations. Throughout these years, several activities were carried out: In 2000 FAPED was invited to participate in the elaboration of the Strategic Plan of SAFOD at a Seminar in Gaborone, Botswana. FAPED participated in the IPR / Africa training sessions for contributions to the International Convention that was to be adopted by the United Nations in December 2006. In 2004, for the first time, former Director General of SAFOD, Mr. Alexander Phiri, presided over the Leadership Training Seminar of the Member Associations.

In Mozambique, the Forum of Associations of Disabled People in Mozambique – the official national affiliate of SAFOD – reported that Mozambique was one of the countries that benefited from the representative studies on Living Conditions of Persons with disabilities in Southern Africa which was a result of an international co-operation between SAFOD, FFO, and SINTEF Unimed. The study brought to the fore the real situation of Persons with disabilities. It was found that the largest number of Persons with disabilities was made up of young people, adolescents and children. They were the most disadvantaged. Women were doubly discriminated against.

In terms of legal protection, the recognition of sign language as an official language for the hearing impaired was as cited as one of the achievements. In December 2009, the National Council for Disability was established, and in June 1999 resolution on disability policy was passed. The UNCRPD had since been signed and ratified by the Mozambique Government. However, there still challenges being faced by Persons with Disabilities in Mozambique, including Main challenges including discriminatory beliefs (mainly affecting Persons with albinism).

In Lesotho, it was noted that the Lesotho National Federation of the Disabled (LNFOD) – which is the official affiliate of SAFOD – was able to demand for the protection of the rights of Persons with disabilities. For instance, Sign language interpreters had been included on the National TV. In addition, there was an allocation of at least 2% of grants to special needs education, although the percentage was very low. The challenge though was that this allocation was not informed by the needs of Persons with disabilities. Furthermore, unlike other countries, Persons with disabilities are not represented in parliament.

It was learnt through a video that was shared during the forum that the official affiliate of SAFOD in Malawi, that the Federation of the Disability organization on Malawi (FEDOMA) which was founded in 1999, was an umbrella organisation of DPOs established to provide a unified voice for all the persons with disabilities. One of the main achievements was that the federation successfully lobbied Government to enact the Bill on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities in 2012. The Disability Act was preceded by the passing of the National Policy on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which was also championed by the disability movement in the country, led by FEDOMA.

However, despite having in place the disability policy and legislation, it was noted that challenges of accessibility continue to exist despite issues pertaining to accessibility being addressed in the policy and/or legislative documents. For this reason, FEDOMA established the Disability Rights Unit project (DRUM) whose one of the main activities was to carry out accessibility audits in several institution including the Office of the President and Cabinet, schools, and private institutions. Short, medium and long term recommendations were given to those institutions that were audited, and failure to comply with the recommendations would eventually call for litigation.

In Zambia, it was reported that the official affiliate of SAFOD, the Federation of Disabled People (ZAFOD), had since its inception in 1990, scored several achievements in its efforts to mainstream disability in the country. For example, ZAFOD was duly recognized by Government, donors and other relevant stakeholders as a functional umbrella and representative body of persons with disabilities in Zambia. This was evidenced by the fact that the federation played an instrumental role in policy and legal framework formulation on disability issues e.g. PWDS Act No. 33 of 1996, PWDs Act, No.6 of 2012, National Disability Policy and Plan, 5th to 7th National Development Plans, Education Act 2011; among others.

In addition, while conducting a number of research work to provide evidence for advocacy work, the federation had increasingly taken centre stage in issues of self-representation by persons with disabilities, such as in the Constitutional Review process, and significantly contributed towards the raising public awareness on disability issues through workshops, seminars, meetings as well as the media.

2.2. Tracking disability movement in Southern Africa; 30 years of activism

The conference benefited from presentations from Mr. Joshua Malinga (SAFOD founder member), Ms. Nyameka Mqikela (Consultant, South Africa), and Mrs Rachel Kachaje, ADF Secretary and SAFOD chairperson. Their presentations focused on tracing the work of disability movement over the thirty years in promoting the rights of Persons with disabilities in the region. They provided analyses of what worked and did not work, what the prevailing situation was like at that moment.

Mr. Malinga, in his remarks emphasised that the task of liberating Persons with disabilities entirely rested on Persons with disabilities themselves but that other stakeholders could only go as far as providing support. In this respect, all people should be involved in any ideological growth, including Persons with disabilities. This called for good leadership among the disability movement. It was only then that participation of Persons with disabilities at all levels of development would become possible. He also underscored the need for development partners to start considering Persons with disabilities as partners and provide equal representation. His concern though was that most communities still held primitive attitudes regarding disability. A need to consider disability as part of diversity was greatly recognised. This was even more critical especially that disability was now a multimillion dollar enterprise.

Ms. Mqikela, while presenting on what went amiss, an evaluation of SAFOD noted that whereas the disability movement had done great work in promoting the rights of Persons with disabilities, the lack of proper leadership, governance issues, inadequate partnership and resources, as well as lack of ownership of initiatives by DPOs and Persons with disabilities was affecting efforts in realising inclusive development. She said the majority of SAFOD's affiliates, however, recognised the significance of SAFOD in supporting them in programming and capacity building. As such, participants recommended that the federation be revived. There was a moment of nostalgia as participants recalled the good work SAFOD had done in shaping the lives of Persons with disabilities in the region as many shared their own experiences in participating in most of the programmes implemented by the organisation. For purpose of continuity, participants resolved that SAFOD resumes to support DPOs to promote their work while building their capacity.

Mrs. Kachaje on her part challenged the participants in finding answers to the following questions: Did SAFOD use the right keys to open wrong doors? What did SAFOD do to come out of this mess? The answers to these questions appeared to summarise the whole purpose of the conference which was to reflect and evaluate the work of SAFOD and the disability movement in general over the past three decades. Like everyone else, Mrs. Kachaje was exceedingly delighted to witness the rebirth of SAFOD as ADF Secretary and SAFOD chairperson.

While presenting an evaluation of the DPO's Capacity and Current Structure at Continental, Sub-Regional and National Level, Mrs. Kachaje provided a brief background on the current membership of ADF to which she noted is instrumental in helping SAFOD realise her goals in the region. ADF was a member of the Disability People International (DPI). It was noted that ADF sought to unify and strengthen the representative voices of Africans with disabilities, their families and organizations. Partnership with SAFOD would therefore provide great synergies in a bid to promote inclusive development.

What also came out clearly was the need for SAFOD to take advantage of the UNCRPD Committee of Experts, currently 5 in number. These include; DR Samuel Kabue – Kenya; Chakar Imed Eddine – Tunisia; Danlami Bashanu – Nigeria; and Coonara Pyaneandee – Mauritius. Meanwhile, it was noted that there were still several African countries that were yet to sign the Optional Protocol hence making the submission of the state reports difficult. It also hindered advocacy efforts in holding government accountable. It was also realised that the capacity of DPOs to understand the different instruments both at national and international level, articulate and engage their respective governments remained a challenge.

Countries that had not ratified the UNCRPD and its Protocol were thus urged to do so and also partner with SAFOD to build their capacity to promote their work.

2.3 Assessing implementation of key AU disability plans and UN disability frameworks

There was discussion around the implementation of Key AU Disability Plans and UN disability Frameworks with presentations from Mr. Kudakwashe Dube, CEO of Africa Disability Alliance (ADA) and Mr. Tomi Lounio, Programme Analyst Human Rights, UNDP regional Service Centre for Africa proving understandings of the current state.

In noting the role SAFOD ought to play in the African Union Continental Plan Action for African of Persons with disability (2010-2019), Mr. Dube pointed out the relevance of SAFOD in promoting the interests of her affiliates by ensuring that the capacity of the federations was built to effectively engage responsible actors. SAFOD should be seen taking the lead in setting agenda for DPOs to follow in a more participatory manner.

However, the most critical issue that cut through the conference was the aspect of evidence based advocacy in which Mr. Lounio further emphasised the need for Governments and development partners to understand documentary evidence unearthing issues of concern. This had, for instance, influenced the UNDP in becoming more disability sensitive and is apparently committed to promoting the rights of Persons with disabilities. UNDP offices and website were apparently more disability sensitive than before.

One concern though was that while there was every effort to promote the well-being of Persons with disabilities, the education of Persons with disabilities was not being prioritised by most stakeholders including governments. This in most cases was observed to have undermined initiatives to promote inclusive development.

2.4 Tracking the financial mechanisms of disability work in Southern Africa

One of the critical issues that emerged at the Roundtable Forum was exploring the financial mechanisms of disability work in southern Africa over the past three decades. Several speakers alluded to the need to fund disability initiatives in Africa.

Speakers included; Mr. Mark Malema, a policy and financing reform specialist in Malawi; Ms. Maria Bakaroudis, Comprehensive Sexuality Education specialist at UNFPA Regional Office; Ms. Christine Cornick, Consultant at Norwegian Association of the Disabled (NAD), Ms. Novuyo Mabusela, CBM Regional Capacity Development officer for the Southern Africa; Mr. Daisuke Sagiya and Mr Toshio Murakami, Department of Social Development (DSD) / JICA South Africa; and Hanne E. Witso, Head of Organisation and Development at FFO.

The speakers discussed the funding opportunities, including challenges that partners and DPOs experience in accessing and managing donor funds.

2.4.1 Disability financing

It was observed that while there were several development opportunities in the region and beyond, those opportunities often did not address concerns of Persons with disabilities. This had continuously excluded disability in the development agenda. Mr. Malema, for instance, noted that whereas MDGs worked to address development issues affecting poor population, there were no indicators on disability.

“Whereas Persons with disabilities constitute 20% of the poorest population, disability was not explicitly included in the MDG framework, whether in the Goals themselves or in the associated targets and indicators. In the absence of such targets and/or indicators related to disability, there was no basis for governments, donors to finance and monitor disability” Mr. Malema observed.

Consequently, the progress that was made so far hid a lot of inequalities. There were highly unequal societies. For instance, large numbers of Persons with disabilities remained excluded from education, health and sanitation, food and information technology. Financing focused on the easiest to reach groups and therefore diverted resources away from some of the poorest groups: most especially those disadvantaged which included Persons with disabilities. There was no disability inclusive development. There was low level monitoring and commitment to financing disability.

The disability movement should now push to tackle the root causes of poverty under the SDGs. Special focus should be placed on disability goals including; Poverty, Education, Economic growth and employment, Reducing inequality, Social inclusion, Inclusive cities, and Monitoring.

The need for Disability financing to ensure that adequate resources are mobilized, pooled and allocated efficiently to disability services and support programme to enable achievement of positive outcomes, was apparent. Achieving the SDGs required the partnership of governments, international community, private sector, civil society and citizens. SAFOD thus needed to undertake the disability financing situation analysis of member countries and build capacity of the affiliates to mobilise resources from their respective governments, private sector among other sources.

2.4.2 UNFPA SRHR programme

Participants also reflected on the experiences of partnership for disability issues in Africa specifically taking lessons from the UNFPA SRHR programme for young people with disabilities. Ms. Bakaroudis shared experiences from the DFID funded project on Prevention of Maternal Deaths in East and Southern Africa that contains a component of SRHR among YPWD. The programme focuses on Evidenced-based advocacy to harmonise the policy and legal environment for development, investment and implementation, Promote Comprehensive Sexuality Education, build capacity for provision of youth friendly SRH services, Initiatives to reach the most vulnerable: child marriage, Young People with Disabilities, Young Key Populations, and Youth leadership and participation.

It was noted that whereas young people found challenges accessing youth friendly services, those with disabilities were more challenged than the counterparts. The vulnerability of YPWD (to sexual abuse, other SGBV, early and unintended pregnancies, HIV/STIs, harmful practices, etc.) increased as they frequently experienced exclusion from sexual & reproductive health information and services. Persons with disabilities were therefore two times more likely to find health care providers' skills & facilities inadequate, three times more likely to be denied health care, and four times more likely to be treated badly in the health care system (WHO, 2014).

Lack of appropriate data even made it worse for Persons with disabilities. The current data however, indicated that children and young persons with disabilities were 2-10 times more likely to be out of school than children without disabilities; they were 3-8 times more likely to experience violence; often lacked knowledge about HIV and sexuality; they were sexually active; and they practiced unsafe sex. Yet they could be agents of change and might need assistance.

There was need for studies to inform regional strategies for resource mobilisation for disability. However, as disability issues were getting increasingly 'trendy' in light of the SDGs and the "leaving no one behind" maxim; resource mobilization efforts for disability issues faced the same challenges, if not more than other sectors; reduced 'capacity' and accountability of DPOs to directly partner with donors; shrinking resources for HIV and other SRH issues; many sectors/causes competing for the resources from the very same donors.

Therefore, in order to maximise on the existing funding opportunities DPOs would want to leverage on the work of multiple implementers and partners through partnerships, but with strong coordination and clear division of labour. There was also need to provide evidence and data so as to influence donors.

2.4.3 Experiences in funding for DPOs

Both Ms Christine Cornick, NAD and Ms Nomvuyo, CBM used their experiences to highlight challenges of accessing and managing donor funding. Lack of capacity of the DPOs to manage funds was prominent with donor community expressing dismay for failure by most disability organisations to adequately account for the resources they receive.

There was also a tendency of the Federations positioning themselves as disability-conscious organisations and yet fail to ensure inclusion of DPOs and Persons with disabilities in programming and funding. Often, this has led to further marginalisation of DPOs and inability to access funding. Partner absorption capacity particularly in programme and finance was also noted with corruption, lack of accountability and transparency in implementation and utilisation of donor funding and resources also taking tall in the development of disability movement in the region. It was, therefore, SAFOD's responsibility to continuously build the capacity of the national affiliates to access and manage donor funds.

In their presentation on the “*Project for the Promotion of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities and Disability Mainstreaming*”, Mr. Sagiya and Mr. Murakami from JICA mentioned that their organization had developed Guidelines outlining the methods for promoting (physical) accessibility; establishment of Accessibility Monitoring Group; orientation on accessibility law; profiling of building on accessibility; advocacy on accessibility in all levels; renovation of buildings; and monitoring on accessibility.

JICA's interaction with DPOs, therefore, was not necessarily rooted in grant making *per se* as a donor, but rather was based on sharing best practices in disability mainstreaming as a partner. They stressed that their approach in the project, initially being implemented in South Africa, had been to share the Guidelines that they developed with UN, WB, AU, ADF, ADA, SADC, SAFOD, DSD, National Governments, National Councils, Federations, DPOs, and many other stakeholders.

2.5 Tracking and assessing the involvement of and the role of private sector and trade unions in inclusive employment over the past 30 years

The need to create opportunities for employing Persons with disabilities was evidently noticed throughout the conference. Dr Jerry Gule, the chairperson of South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D), while discussing the experiences of the private sector involvement on issues of accessibility and inclusive employment observed that whereas the population of Persons with disabilities in South Africa was estimated between 7% and 10% out of the country's population of 54.9 million, unemployment rate was at 27%. Against this background SAE4D was thus formed by employers committed to the integration of Persons with disabilities in their workplaces as a way of promoting employment of Persons with disabilities.

While employment of Persons with disabilities is a constitutional obligation, most companies in South Africa were not employing Persons with disabilities because of attitudinal barriers and ignorance. The need to continuously build a business case for employing Persons with disabilities was evident among the participants. As such, SAE4D worked towards supporting employers to create an enabling environment in which Persons with disabilities suffer no discrimination and are integrated in human resources strategy and practices of companies.

Mr. Paliani Chinguwo of Southern Africa Trade Union Coordination Council (SATUCC) spoke about role of trade Unions in promoting decent employment. He said in the recent past, there had been dramatic shift in the way Persons with disabilities were viewed within the labour movement in the region and beyond. There was an appreciation that disability was a critical dimension of human kind and affirmation that all people have certain inalienable rights including labour rights. The shift was towards doing work around the promotion of decent work for Persons with disabilities in the region. With the putting in place of the SADC Protocol on employment and labour, chances were high that Persons with disabilities would fully realise their employment rights. The SADC Protocol has a dedicated clause for workers with disabilities (Article 17) which, among other things, urges State Parties to “ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded the rights protected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 2006, in particular employment and social protection rights.”

SATUCC was, therefore, open to collaboration with SAFOD to promote and provide space for perspectives of Persons with disabilities within trade union movement in light of decent work; to foster close collaboration between the trade union and the disability movement in SADC; and to ensure that trade unions services are accessible and relevant to workers/Persons with disabilities. As such, the SATUCC Executive Council had sanctioned the partnership between SATUCC and SAFOD, hence providing a broader framework for joint activities between SATUCC and SAFOD on the promotion of the interests of Persons with disabilities in the context of the decent work agenda.

Mr. Siyabonga Gule gave a presentation on the Impact of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution” on Jobs and Disability. In his presentation, he illustrated how new technological advances would affect various aspects of rights of Persons with disabilities.

Of particular interest was the fact that he showcased more positive developments of new technology that were focused on enhancing the independent living among persons with disabilities within their homes. However, from the discussions that ensued, it was a rather different story with regards to the job prospects for Persons with disabilities based on the experience that the more new technological devices were used to perform jobs that would otherwise be performed by several humans, the more the human beings were being marginalized in the process, more so the Persons with Disabilities who are already disadvantaged and discriminated against when it comes to employment.

Delegates therefore recommended that there was need for Persons with Disabilities and their DPOs to become more innovative in the way they advocate for their rights related to labour and employment, including the new laws and policies that can guarantee more legal protection in the face of the new “World Order of Work.”

2.6 Creating early childhood inclusive environments and/or practices

Using experiences from Ndinogona Inclusive Early Childhood Development Stimulation Program and Promoting Inclusion in ECDE within CBR programs project, the conference discussed modalities of ensuring children with disability have access to quality education. Representatives of UHAMBO, an organisation working in Southern Africa to promote inclusion of children with disabilities ignited a debate on the need to change mind-set in order to achieve inclusive education.

UHAMBO, for instance, had surveyed 21000 households; provided 70,000 assistive devices; trained therapists and caregivers in all the 9 South Africa provinces as well as in Namibia and Botswana. UHAMBO also played an important role in advocacy and policy development on disability rights and green paper on inclusive education in South Africa; participated in the development of the World Health Organization (WHO) Guidelines; pioneered the design and provision of a manual on wheelchairs in less resourced communities.

Participants thus noted that inclusion was not simple or linear. It required a holistic approach; understanding that children with disability have potential, empowering and capacitating parents; and engaging communities so that they have clear understanding of rights. Capacity building was not just about provision of skills but tools – hence the need for creating a mind shift to change the expectations and acknowledging that every child has potential.

Ms Patience Kanguma of the Zambian Federation of Disability Organisation (ZAFOD), like UHAMBO observed that inclusive education required everyone's participation. In this respect, the Promoting Inclusion in ECDE with CBR programs project in Zambia, Angola, Lesotho and Mozambique, used multi-disciplinary teams (teachers, Nurses, Social welfare officer) to identify children with disability before they could be enrolled in school. And that early identification and interventions within CBR programs promoted child development and socialisation. Involvement of parents of children with disabilities, as well as DPOs, was further noted as key to the success of ECDE.

However, there was need for intensified awareness among community members, traditional leaders, and other stakeholders regarding early identification of children with disabilities. There was also need to engage government and donor community on CBR and inclusive education.

2.7 Disability and Development Research

There was serious concern regarding not only the utilisation of data on disability but also the quality of the existing data and how much Persons with disabilities were involved in the conduct of the research concerning issues affecting their lives. Several speakers underscored the need to improve the quality of research on disability for improved evidenced advocacy. At the same time, it was important that the available data be utilised to inform the interventions designed for Persons with disabilities.

In his presentation, *Building research capacity as part of the SAFOD Research Programme*, Professor Leslie Swartz from the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University gave a background to the SAFOD Research Programme (SRP) funded by DFID, in which he was the lead resource person (trainer). He said this unique research program was premised on the following factors: historical marginalization of Persons with disabilities and disability; Persons with disabilities as objects of professional scrutiny (including medical scrutiny); voicelessness; disability/poverty links; overwhelming needs, with disability seen as a minority issue.

Dr. Alister Munthali observed that while development was meant to support and improve living conditions of all human beings, and to empower them economically, politically, and socially, evidence indicated that Persons with disabilities were often excluded in development agenda. Research was therefore important in understanding issues affecting the development of Persons with disabilities and what interventions were needed. Unfortunately, the available research was not being utilised. Research in programs design was thus critical in improving condition of Persons with disabilities.

Policy makers thus needed data for policy development and change, and the statistical data indicating magnitude of a problem was critical. There was, however, limited participation of Persons with disabilities in design and implementation of interventions meant to improve conditions of Persons with disabilities.

The need to involve Persons with disabilities in research was seen as critical in finding appropriate solutions to their problems because they understand their issues better than researchers without disability. Application of Human-centred approach to development should be encouraged. Additionally, the need to build the capacity of DPOs to utilise research evidence was critical to policy and programming. SAFOD, therefore, needed to develop disability research agenda.

While presenting best practices and lessons from the African Network for Evidence-to-Action in Disability (AfriNEAD), Associate Professor at Stellenbosch University and AfriNEAD Chairperson, Gubela Mji, noted that there was need to strengthen AfriNEAD affiliations with regional and international disability networks as well as global organs such as WHO, UNESCO and UN with a view of synergizing efforts to turn Evidence to Action and Action to Evidence. She traced the origins of AfriNEAD from the research outcomes from SAFOD research program, stressing that the evolution of AfriNEAD was influenced by limited research evidence on disability. In fact, even the fewer available evidence was questionable on impact on the lives of Persons with Disabilities. Questions were therefore raised regarding type and strength of research methods, as challenge of translating research evidence from policy to practice continued to reign.

On the other hand, in his presentation on the evaluation of the impact of the Living Conditions Studies (LCS) in Southern Africa, Professor Arne Henning Eide of SINTEF in Norway, noted that while some countries seem to have had a very successful impact as a result of the studies, there were others that had less successful impact. His presentation was based on the Evaluation of the impact and lessons learned carried out by Professor Swartz & Vergunst of Stellenbosch University in 2016.

Prof. Aide further noted that countries where there had been good collaboration between stakeholders, strong leadership within DPOs and more government involvement had shown to be more successful in terms of impact. The impact of the survey had much to do with the prebaking political, economic and social circumstances of a country. For this reason, there was a critical debate among the delegators regarding the extent to which DPOs must engage with their respective Governments, without risking to be corrupted or abused politically by the same Governments they were seeking to collaborate. There was, however, a general consensus that DPOs needed to play active roles, even to the extent of receiving funding, as long as such collaboration and/or funding did not compromise their own work ethics and remained resolute towards achieving goals. It was nonetheless observed by Prof. Aide that despite the inter-country differences, the LCS process was experienced as a very good advocacy tool which highlighted disability issues in most countries.

One of the key recommendation emanating from the evaluation was the need for a Disability Resource Centre in southern Africa, as identified by the LCS aims, which would require more ongoing high-level research and monitoring capacity as a partnership with DPOs.

2.8 Raising a case for the SADC disability protocol

One of the key issues that were discussed during the Round Table Forum was the draft SADC Disability Protocol currently being championed by SAFOD. A consultant hired by SAFOD, Mr. Wamundila Waliuya, who is also Commissioner at Human Rights Commission in Zambia, presented the Key findings of the *“Review of SADC Protocols and Other Key Relevant SADC Documents to Assess the Extent to which they are Inclusive of Disability Rights.”* The desk review eventually informed the drafting of the SADC Disability Protocol which he also presented during the forum.

He however stressed that what presented during the forum was just draft protocol which was just developed. It had not yet been reviewed, except by one person. This meant that this group was the first to review this document. He urged the forum delegates to read carefully and place comments in the table that he prepared.

This was followed by another related presentation by Mr. Bheki Jele on the establishment of the Regional Advocacy Platform on the Campaign for the SADC Disability Protocol, to support SAFOD's campaign for the adoption of the SADC Disability Protocol by December 2019. The campaign involved carrying out a series of consultations with various stakeholders and soliciting their inputs into the draft disability policy framework for SADC, and consolidating the inputs from stakeholders in order to develop the final draft of Disability SADC Protocol that can be shared with SADC Secretariat.

He said the other objective of the series of consultations was to popularize and secure buy-in from the stakeholders until the draft Protocol is all-embracing enough to be presented to the SADC Secretariat in 2019 for their own review, inputs and presentation to the member states for consideration and possible adoption.

However, it is pertinent to note that the role of SAFOD in this regard is just to initiate and lead the process during the initial stages. A more independent platform of different stakeholders needed to be formed to continue driving the campaign forward if the process is to be more credible and owned by various stakeholders beyond just SAFOD and its national affiliates of DPOs.

It is therefore against this background that the platform was formally endorsed during the Regional Disability Round Table Forum whose structure and terms of reference (TORs) were thoroughly discussed and agreed upon.

2.9 Panel Debate:

Enhancing the role of SAFOD, the entire disability sector, donors and private sector towards achieving sustainable and inclusive development in the region

Facilitated by Ms. Nyameka Mqikela, a panel debate was organized against the background that that SAFOD, which was being hyped as the only established regional organization of DPOs working in “Southern Africa” as a region, was not truly representative of the entire region, as it was operating in ten of the 15 SAC centres. That meant five SADC countries – Tanzania, DRC, Mauritius, Madagascar and Seychelles. It means for the last 30 years SAFOD has not been able to truly reach out (or make impact) in the whole region, meaning the term “Southern Africa” within the full name for SAFOD may be misleading. Not only the name, but also the organizations mission statement, vision statement, etc., may also be misleading as they all make reference to the “Southern Africa” region.

Considering that there is no other network/organizations of DPOs currently covering the whole SADC region, there was therefore a question of whether it was high time to begin exploring possibilities of expanding SAFOD's constituency to truly cover the entire region on the basis that SAFOD was viewed as an organization with limited capacity as well as credibility by SADC and other regional bodies. When the organization sought to engage meaningfully with the SADC Secretariat, for example, the latter had on a number of occasions questioned the mandate and credibility of SAFOD as an organization that can be trusted with the responsibility to pursue a regional agenda if it cannot reach out to all countries in the region. It was learnt that these developments had significantly spoiled SAFOD's chances to form partnerships SADC and other regional institutions.

The question that was put to the panellists as well as the floor was, “now that SAFOD is celebrating 30 years of its existence, could this be the right time for SAFOD to increase its constituency/mandate from the current 10 countries to all 15 countries in the SADC Bloc?” All the panellists were in support with the idea of expanding SAFOD's constituency, and this was the case with the other delegates too. However, some delegates cautioned that the motivation to expand should really be informed by the need on the going to do so. They recommended that such a move should be done within the capacity of the organization, and must not be seen as trying satisfy individuals' mere egos to look big.

3.0 SIDE EVENTS

The side events focused on a number of thematic areas including assistive technology (AT) and the work that SAFOD and its partners the University of Washington and AfriNEAD were involved in; disability mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction organized by Federation of the Disability Organizations in Malawi (FEDOMA) and its partner NAD; and community based inclusive development organized by the CBR Africa Network (CAN) and its partner CBM.

The event focusing on AT was titled “*Assessing Impact of Assistive Technologies in Southern Africa,*” and it was noted during the event that many persons with disabilities in the region who require AT do not access it due to various factors, including lack of information about available AT; most of ATs are not affordable and accessible to many persons with disabilities; lack of general awareness about what constitutes AT; among other factors. Participants to the event were generally in agreement with all the factors that were outlined, and were able to relate with what was obtaining on the ground.

SAFOD, University of Washington, and AfriNEAD presented two initiatives that were working to address gaps and AT access, and sought feedback from the participants on shaping these initiatives to fit the needs of each country. The initiatives included a project dubbed *Assistive Technology Information Mapping Project (AT-Info-Map)* and the *AfriNEAD Country Working Groups* which sought to strengthen the research capacity and coordination among DPOs and other stakeholders at country level with AT as one of the key research themes. Delegates welcomed the initiatives and they – especially the SAFOD affiliates – pledged support as they hoped that the success of these two initiatives would ultimately result in increased access of AT; hence increased quality of life in general of persons with disabilities.

The event on “Mainstreaming Disability in Disaster Risk Reduction” Identified key achievements, challenges and opportunities to integrate DIDRR agendas within the development planning. It was noted that even though a growing number of persons with disabilities, compared to the general population, continue to face higher risks and are disproportionately affected by disasters, it was pleasing that there were some isolated good practices that sought to address this. The project implemented by FEDOMA in Malawi could be described as one of the models that can be in other countries to advance the DIDRR agenda within development planning. One of the recommendation was to advocate for inclusive national policies related to disaster management. Delegates further discussed how persons with disabilities and their organisations could and should contribute towards inclusive disaster risk reduction, emphasizing the need for the DPOs themselves to be well sensitized and capacitated to be able to influence conducive policies related to DIDRR and provide the necessary help/advise on designing sound programmes on the ground.

The event on *“Keeping DPOs at the Heart of Community Based Inclusive Development (CBID)”* explored the opportunities or possibilities of partnership in the promotion of CBR work in Africa. There was recognition of the fact that CBID was a more progressive terminology to CBR, and this new concept was focused more on enhancing the participation and voice of persons with disabilities in decision-making processes at the local level. Furthermore, the CIBD approach augured well with UNCRPD, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

CAN used the event not only to recruit membership and promote the development of CBR networks but also took the opportunity to announce the CBR Africa conference which was being planned to take place in Zambia in May 2018.

On the evening of the June 23, 2017 SAFOD climaxed the Southern Africa Disability Round Table Forum by organizing a Gala Dinner to honour disability activists for their outstanding contributions over the period of 30 years in each of the ten countries where SAFOD currently operates. The Southern Africa Disability Champions Awards is an initiative to sustain activism and advocacy for the mainstreaming of disability within SADC.

However, noting that in many countries, there have been many illustrious disability activists, choosing only one might not only be taxing but might also feel like omitting the great work that the others did or have done. In the spirit of recognizing such other work, SAFOD therefore created the “SAFOD Hall of Fame” that also featured during the Gala Dinner.

SAFOD, in partnership with the South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D), also presented the Private Sector Excellence Awards in recognition of private sector entities that had demonstrated disability inclusiveness. SAFOD is using these awards as part of a regional advocacy for disability mainstreaming, and the organization recognizes that that the private sector is among those that require increased awareness in this regard, yet it is often unnoticed.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The 2017 Disability Round Table Forum played a significant role in raising awareness about disability mainstreaming among donor agencies and other key partners who discussed how they could effectively integrate disability within their various programs in the region.

This was achieved not only through the presentations, keynote addresses/speeches and deliberations during the main event, but also through a number of side events that were organized to provide more insights on issues affecting the disability sector in the region. All these intended to deepen understanding on issues that affect mainstreaming and inclusive development in the region.

For this reason, we sincerely thank all delegates for the lively participation throughout the forum, as without their active participation, SAFOD could not have achieved the goals for which the forum was organized. Most importantly, we would also like to recognise FFO who sponsored the event, and also all the other partners who contributed in many different ways to make the forum possible.

Indeed, Inclusive Development is the driving force behind SAFODs Strategic Plan (2016 – 2020). We view Inclusive Development as a pro-poor approach that equally values and incorporates the contributions of all stakeholders – including marginalized groups who current statistics show a significant fragment constitute Persons with disabilities in the region – in addressing development issues.

From our perspective as SAFOD, Inclusive Development can never be achieved if we do not strategically mainstream disability within the overall development agenda. We want to help build better, stronger, and more inclusive communities in a spirit that reflects partnership and participation between Persons with Disabilities, their caregivers, service providers, government agencies, and the public at large. The regional forums are, therefore, a critical vehicle through which we can reinforce such partnerships and enhance participation of Persons with Disabilities.

However, SAFOD recognizes that that there were many other equally important thematic issues that were not tackled at the 2017 forum. Examples may include issues related to inclusive sports (such as Paralympics); inclusive arts, inclusive ICT, inclusive social protection systems/programs, just to mention a few. In just three-and-half days, there was no way we could not have sufficiently dealt with everything.

It is on this understanding that SAFOD proposed the holding of such forums at least triennially with a view of not only providing an opportunity to evaluate on progress related to the recommendations agreed at the last forum, but also ensuring that the subsequent forums introduce new or emerging or 'forgotten' thematic issues that were not on the agenda at the last forum, but which are enormously important to push the mainstreaming and inclusive agenda forward in the region.

We, therefore, invite you our affiliates, our strategic partners, and all other stakeholders to feel free to support the next forum in 2020 in any way that you deem feasible, including contributing your ideas, proposing any thematic issues that you feel should form part of the agenda, and where possible contributing any financial or material resources.

Do not hesitate to contact the SAFOD Secretariat. We are available and glad to hear from you anytime.

We look forward to seeing you at the next forum.