



NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY



A SNAP SURVEY

IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON THE LIVELIHOODS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN SIERRA LEONE

DECEMBER 2020

CONTENTS

ACRONYMS	1
FORWARD	2
1.0: Executive Summary	3
2.0: Introduction	5
3.0: Brief Literature Review	6
4.0: Survey Methodology	8
5.0: Survey Findings.....	9
5.1: Demographic Information of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) ...	9
5.2: Vulnerability Context and Livelihood Strategies.....	9-10
5.3: Livelihood outcomes	11
5.4: Financial Capital.....	12
5.5: Participation and the effect of COVID 19 on PWDs	13
6.0: Recommendations.....	14
References.....	15
Names of Researchers:.....	16



ACRONYMS

COVID 19	Corona Virus Disease 2019
GDP	Gross Domestic Products
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent
IDA	International Disability Alliance
ILO	International Labor Organization
MTNDP	Medium Term National Development Plan
NCPD	National Commission for Persons with Disability
NDC	National Disability Coalition
OPDs	Organizations for Persons with Disabilities
POPDA	Polio Persons Development Association
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
SLAB	Sierra Leone Association for the Blind
SLAPWA	Sierra Leone Association of Persons with Albinism
SLUDI	Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization



FORWARD



In December 2020, the National Commission for Persons with Disability undertook an assessment survey to gauge the impact of COVID 19 on Persons with Disabilities in Sierra Leone. The aim has been to ascertain the gravity of the COVID 19 and how it invariably affected the livelihood and living conditions of Persons with Disabilities.

The survey result suggested that the COVID

19 has disproportionately affected persons with disabilities either directly or indirectly. The Government of Sierra Leone is committed to improving the lives of Persons with Disabilities in Sierra Leone but the COVID 19 has further frustrated its efforts in addressing their special needs.

Social distancing rules limited offers of help from the public to persons with disabilities, for instance support crossing the street. COVID 19 response narratives emphasising the importance of ‘healthy body’ exacerbate these difficulties and increase stigma towards disabled people.

I wish to thank the research team at NCPD for their dedicated services and the Government of Sierra Leone for their continuous support to Persons with Disabilities in our beloved nation. It is my fervent hope that the Government of Sierra Leone and development partners will seize this opportunity to articulate the aspirations of persons with disabilities in all development programming.

James Taiwo Cullen
Chairman - NCPD



1.0: Executive Summary

The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) commissioned a rapid Assessment/Snap survey to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihood of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone. The objectives of the snap survey were to understand the current livelihood activities of persons with disabilities and how they are affected by the COVID 19 response; to align the current Mid-Term National Development Plan 2019—2023 (Cluster 5.3) for an effective and efficient direct response to the livelihood activities of persons with disabilities; to encourage and lobby national and international partners to support the livelihood activities of persons with disabilities.

We developed a questionnaire with four simple and short modules covering vulnerability context, livelihood strategies and outcomes, financial capital and participation within their communities. The questionnaires were responded to by Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) across the regions. Our research team also met with various groups in focus group discussions to gauge the qualitative analysis of the survey and throw light on various nuances faced by persons with disabilities in their quest to have sustainable livelihoods.

We further conducted a desktop review of disability and livelihoods.

OPDs are found to be engaged in Agriculture (34%), Petty Trading (15%) and Life-skills (50%). Their main life skills are shoemaking, bag designing, tailoring, hairdressing, black smiting, soap making, local mattress production, welding, metalwork, electrical/electronics. The revenue they generate as a group is used for food, education and health-related issues (45%). The majority (84%) have no money in the bank as a group. The prices of their products were gravely affected as a result of the pandemic especially during the brief lockdowns initiated by the Government. They also revealed they have no access to financial service institutions, no bank accounts and no savings (65%). The prime financial service they access is the rotational savings known as “OSUSU” and microcredit loans (60%). Their current levels of savings within their organizations is very low whilst others (12%) showed they have nothing as savings within their organizations.

The average income generated per month ranges from 300,000, 500,000, to 1, 500,000 Leones per month for some groups and women are found to be part of the livelihood activities they do. They showed they are aware of their political, human, social and



Lead Researcher and M & E Manager explain the rationale Behind the survey in the Eastern Region

economic rights but never secure against physical damage, violence, natural and economic shocks (95%) specially this time of the pandemic. They also reported that public attitudes (60%), discrimination (15%), lack of family and wider society support (10%), absence of assistive devices (15%) are some of the key elements that bar them from participating in community activities. 45% indicated that the pandemic affects their disability and that of their households and places immense financial burden (15%) on them very much. Others indicated that their families struggle a lot (20%) whilst their income-earning opportunities were almost obliterated (20%) with their families needing help during the pandemic. We, therefore, recommend the following: There is, therefore, a need to support OPDs who show immense interest and dedication to subsistent farming

and should be supported during the planting season. The Commission and other stakeholders should ensure OPDs are supported with the necessary tools, financial resources and training needed to embark on sustainable production and marketing. The Commission should engage financial service institutions to support the activities of OPDs who meet the requirement for a loan and other bank grants across the country. We need to continue public education via print, electronics and social media on the rights of PWDs and their inclusion in governance and development activities. The Commission is to encourage PWDs in OPDs to save funds they generate whilst the Commission will engage financial service providers to consider PWDs as individuals and as groups in OPDs for financial services to support their livelihood activities. The Commission will continue to encourage PWDs/OPDs to register and open accounts with banks within their communities. We further found the continuous need for assistive devices (prosthesis, white canes, braille, crutches, wheelchairs etc.) to aid PWDs in OPDs. The Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Finance should increase budget allocation to the Commission for increased support of the livelihood activities of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone.



2.0: Introduction

The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) commissioned a rapid Assessment/Snap survey to understand and assess the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihood of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone. The key objectives for the snap survey were:

(1) To understand the current livelihood activities of persons with disabilities and how they are affected by COVID 19 response;

(2) to align the current Mid-Term National Development Plan 2019—2023 (Cluster 5.3) for an effective and efficient direct response to the livelihood activities of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone;

(3) to encourage and lobby national and international partners to support the livelihood activities of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected persons with disabilities across the world and in Sierra Leone in particular. The [International Disability Alliance \(IDA\)](#) and [WHO](#) say that persons with disabilities are more likely to face more barriers during a humanitarian crisis unless some practical solutions are availed to effectively address the range of risks. The United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy recognizes that the rights of persons with disabilities are central to the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, whereby the principle of Leaving No-one Behind requires transformative and lasting change, particularly, during times of crisis.

The government of Sierra Leone has for the first time captured a cluster (5.3) in Sierra Leone's Mid-Term National Development Plan 2019—2023 with three (3) main objectives; 1) to ensure comprehensive review and implementation of policies and laws relating to disability, especially making public facilities disability friendly; 2) review and improve incentives for Teachers and Special Needs Institutions, and provide free healthcare for the physically challenged and the aged; 3) generally, provide livelihood support to persons living with disability for economic empowerment. The Cluster 5.3 dedicated to persons with disabilities is accompanied by four (4) main outcomes of which Outcome 3 is to gain “increased economic empowerment for persons with disability”.

It is with this backdrop that the Commission conducted this snap survey covering all the five (5) regions with the key objectives indicated above and with the desire to complement the efforts of the Government in the full implementation of Cluster 5.3 of the current Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019—2023.



Icom Manager sorting the views of PWDS on the impact of Covid-19



3.0: Brief Literature Review

According to Chambers, R., Conway, G. (1992), Livelihood can be defined as the means through which individuals or households can meet their basic needs. It encompasses not only remunerated labour, but also individual capabilities (e.g., level of education, skills), assets and participation in other productive activities (e.g., farming for direct consumption). “A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (Chambers & Conway, 1991).

The International Committee of the Red Cross/Crescent (ICRC) reported that the “negative societal effects of COVID-19 all over the world have, in many cases, been even more profound when viewed through the lens of persons with disabilities” Persons with disabilities already deal with increased health challenges, exacerbated threats to their security, and societal marginalization that negatively impacts nearly every facet of their lives. With the onset of the pandemic and its attendant social restrictions — persons with disabilities are at risk of being pushed even further to the periphery of their communities, potentially negating any progress that had been made.

Jones, M.K. (2008) indicated in his research that people with disabilities face widespread exclusion from livelihood

opportunities in many settings. While there is clear evidence from high-income countries of a gap in the employment rate between people with and without disabilities - equivalent analyses from low-to-middle income countries (LMICs) are more challenging given the complexity of livelihood situations in many of these settings.

The International Labor Organization reported (2009) that households that include a person with disabilities have extra costs for medical care, assistive devices, personal support and transportation. Access to a sustainable livelihood will enable them to contribute to the disability-related costs. Employers increasingly recognize the benefits of diverse workforces. And creating an environment that is supportive for people with disabilities also makes economic sense at a national level.

Jones, N., Presler-Marshall, E; Stavropoulou, M. (2018) revealed in their studies that there is a high cost to national economies for keeping people with disabilities out of the workforce, for example, due to the extra costs of social protection or the lost incomes by family members, usually, women are unable to work due to their caretaker role. The ILO has concluded ‘that economic losses related to disability are large and measurable, falling into a band between 3 and 7 per cent of GDP’.

Cramm, J.M. and Finkenflügel, H. (2008) also indicated that people with disabilities regularly face difficulties in obtaining start-up capital



for their businesses. Microfinance institutions are reluctant to target people with disabilities, as they perceive them as clients with a high risk of not paying back a loan. They are also reluctant to adapt their services and products to clients with specific needs and cannot provide necessary support in this regard. On the other hand, persons with disabilities, especially those in rural areas, may lack access to appropriate information that would enable them to make use of mainstream services or join savings groups.

The Liliane Foundation research “Towards Disability-Inclusive Sustainable Livelihood” (2020), highlighted four (4) **pre-conditions** for sustainable livelihoods for persons with disabilities namely; 1) skills development and training; 2) self-employment; 3) waged employment

development in livelihoods; 3) knowledge partnership and; 4) effective networking. These pre-conditions and steps, if followed diligently and professionally, will immensely con



Coordinator North Beatrice Koroma engaging stakeholders on Covid-19

tribute towards disability-inclusive sustainable livelihoods.

People with disabilities have the same rights as any other people to meet their basic human needs, to enjoy an adequate standard of living and decent work in which they will develop as people and professionals. They also have the right to contribute to the well-being of their families and the sustainable development of their communities.



(L-R) Regional Coordinator South and program Manager delivering on the Mid-term development plan and its benefit to PWDS

and 4) social protection. The Foundation also recommends another four (4) steps towards inclusive and sustainable livelihoods: 1) multi-stakeholder collaboration; 2) capacity





4.0: Survey Methodology



Regional Coordinator West Jonathan Conteh informing stakeholders on the survey Methodology

We initially developed a questionnaire with four simple and short modules looking principally at the vulnerability context of PWDs in OPDs within the COVID 19 period, their livelihood strategies and outcomes, their financial capital and participation within their communities. The questionnaire developed was tested with the participation of 5 OPDs within the Western Area of Freetown to ensure the NCPD research team together with the would-be respondents capture just the basic information needed for analysis of the study. We then printed and administered 1, 250 questionnaires for the five regions; 250 questionnaires for each Region (North, North-West, South, East and Western Area). The questionnaires were responded to by Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) across the regions. Our research team

also met with various groups in focus group discussions to gauge the qualitative analysis of the survey and throw light on various nuances faced by persons with disabilities in their quest to have sustainable livelihoods. We further conducted a desktop review of disability and livelihoods including how COVID 19 likely affects the livelihood of persons with disabilities across the board.

Before the administration of the questionnaire, the NCPD research team conducted regional workshops on the content of the questionnaire, knowledge and information of the COVID 19 and the Medium-Term National Development Plan especially on economic empowerment for persons with disabilities as a key outcome. These workshops were done to guide respondents to the questionnaire and the focus group discussions to fully capture the essence of the survey for persons with disabilities



Stakeholders in the Eastern Region discussing on the survey Methodology



5.0: Survey Findings

5.1: Demographic Information of Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)

Respondents within Organizations for Persons with Disabilities indicated that their membership is between **35 to 150** members. However, some OPDs that form consortiums/coalitions have a membership between **500 to 1000** and above especially in the case of the Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues (SLUDI), the National Disability Coalition (NDC) and the Polio Persons Development Association (POPDA) etc.

The disability categories of those who responded to our questionnaire and focus group discussions were mainly the physically challenged (**62%**), visual impaired (**10%**), Albinos (**3%**), leprosy (**5%**), amputees (**10%**), hearing impaired (**5%**), mental health (**5%**). Disability categories within OPDs membership were found to be mixed categories except in the case of a few OPDs that have the same categories of disabilities like the Sierra Leone Association for Blind (SLAB) and the Sierra Leone Association of Persons with Albinism (SLAPWA).

Persons with disabilities as respondents to the questionnaire further revealed that their Organizations for persons with disabilities have children with disabilities (**62%**) whilst others indicated that they have no children in their OPDs (**38%**). Children with disabilities in their organizations are cared for and supported by the organizations with minimal or no support for outside.

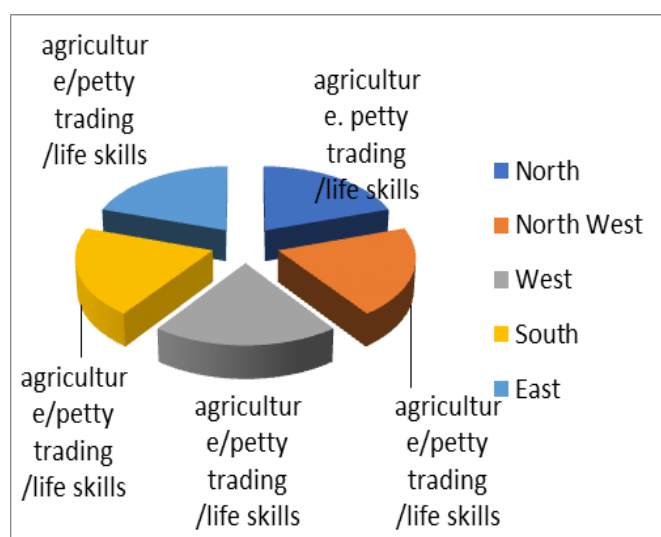
5.2: Vulnerability Context and Livelihood Strategies

All OPDs respondents to our survey questionnaire and focus group discussions indicated that they are fully engaged in livelihood activities (100%) and that their livelihood activities are very important to them (100%).

North	50	100%
North-West	50	100%
West	50	100%
South	50	100%
East	50	100%
Total	250	100%

Table showing percentages of group members that produce or engaged in livelihood activities

The various livelihood activities of OPDs are found to be engaged in can be put into



A Pie Chart indicate the three main broad categories of livelihood activities OPDs are engaged in

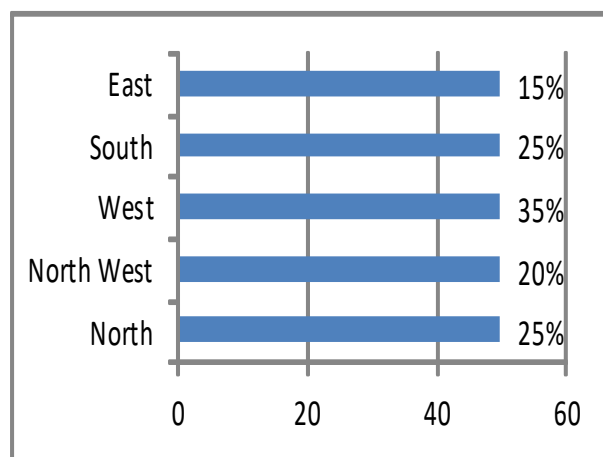


three (3) main categories: Agriculture, Petty Trading and Life-skills. 35% of OPDs are found to be engaged in subsistent agriculture mainly in the South and the Northern Region, 15% are in petty trading whilst 50% are engaged in life skills. The main life skills persons with disabilities are found to be engaged in are shoemaking, bag designing, tailoring, hairdressing, blacksmithing, soap making, local mattress production, welding, metalwork, electrical/electronics. It should be noted that those who are engaged in agriculture are predominantly from the South and the North according to respondents to our questionnaire whilst those in the East and the Western Area are predominantly involved in life skills training and development. However, our focus group discussions further indicated that a proportion of PWDs residing in Bonthe and Western Rural (Tokeh and Tombo) are engaged in fishing of which scale this study does not ascertain.

45% of respondents interviewed indicated that the revenue they generate as a group is used for food, education and health-related issues, others (25%) indicated their revenue is used for the administrative work of their organization whilst others (30%) showed their revenue is used for clothing and household consumption.

Respondents also further indicated that about 15% to 35% of what they generate

is marketed so the group could save for other financial commitments. But probing further as to whether they save money as a group in the bank or other forms of savings, the majority (84%) indicated they have no money in the bank as a group whilst others (16%) indicated they are saving as a group. However, the majority (90%) of respondents showed that the prices of their products were gravely affected as a result of the pandemic especially during the brief lockdowns initiated by the Government. The remaining 10% of respondents were unable to know whether the pandemic affected the prices of their products generally.



A Bar Chart showing the proportion of products marketed





85% of respondents show they have no access to financial service institutions as a group. They generally do not meet the requirements of financial service institutions whilst 15% of them indicated they do have access to financial service institutions. They however face challenges of public misperceptions and discrimination based on their disability. 65% of respondents OPDs do not have Bank Accounts and have no savings in a Bank. The remaining 35% of OPDs have bank accounts recently opened as a result of the NCPD's policy to support OPDs through the Commission's direct annual livelihood support.

OPDs are also found to be involved in work between 5, 8, to 12 hours a day. The majority (63%) indicated they work 12 and above hours a day whilst the remaining respondents (37%) said they work between 5 to 8 hours a day. We also discover that there had not been any changes in the livelihoods of OPDs during the pandemic. OPDs reported that they are involved with the same livelihood activities and had no resources to change them for now. The average income generated per month ranges from 300,000 Leones (45%) to 500,000 (35%) to 1, 500,000 Leones (20%) per month depending on the size of the group and the key livelihood activities the OPD is engaged in. Respondents also indicated that women are part of the livelihood activities and that women constitute the bulk of their organization (25%) whilst others indicated that women are not part of them as their organizations are predominantly masculine membership (75%).

5.3: Livelihood outcomes

85% of OPDs respondents showed they are aware of their political, human, social and economic rights. The remaining 15% are not sure of what it means. 56% revealed they do not have access to means of ensuring that their rights are met whilst 44% of OPDs interviewed said they are fully engaged in civil society advocacy to ensure their rights are met by the state. Members in OPDs out rightly indicated that they are never secure against physical damage, violence, natural and economic shocks (95%) specially this time of the pandemic. The remaining (5%) considered themselves to be secure and certain of themselves.

On the issues of their sources of information about COVID 19, respondents indicated that their sources of information are mainly from community radios, Television, workshops attended, banners/flyers, social media, public adverts and Bill Boards. The majority of respondents (86%) indicated that information on COVID 19 they have been receiving is of quality and can be trusted whilst others (14%) were not sure of the quality of information they have been receiving citing principally incidences of fake news in the social media.



Lead Researcher sorting the view of stakeholders on their source of livelihood



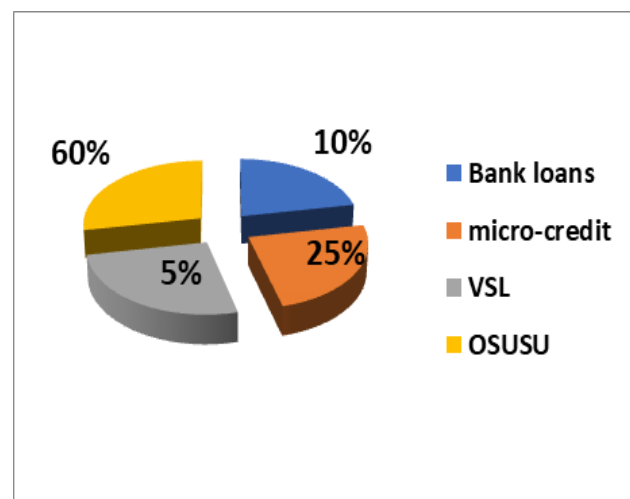
Sources of information	Res. No	%
Community Radio	300	23%
Training workshops	250	17%
Television	150	10%
Flyers	150	10%
Social Media	200	15%
Public adverts	200	15%
Bill Boards	100	10%
Total	1,500	100%

A Table showing percentages of the sources of information for group members

On the is the issue of political representation for persons with disabilities within the political process in the entire country, OPDs interviewed revealed they are not represented fully. Only a few who are not even members of any OPDs are part of the political process citing cases of Bombali and Kono where persons with disabilities have a representation in governance. For respondents to the questionnaire, this area is still a huge challenge that needs affirmative action by political parties and communities where an aspirant person with a disability resides.

5.4: Financial Capital

Respondents further indicated some of the various financial services they can access. 60% of them indicated that the prime financial service they access is the rotational savings known as “OSUSU”, 25% indicated they are microcredit, 10% of them are taking bank loans whilst only 5% are following the Village Savings and Loan Scheme within their communities.



A Pie Chart showing the types of financial services group members can access

Respondents also indicated that some of their members do not have access to financial services as individuals as some financial service institutions do not give individual loans but group loans. OPDs interviewed lamented of the financial services put immense barriers to accessing finances in the form of high-interest rates and collateral requirements that OPDs do not generally meet either as individuals or as an organization.

88% showed that their current levels of savings within their organizations is very low whilst others (12%) showed they have nothing as savings within their organizations. The majority 73% indicated that their form of savings is the Village Savings and Loans Schemes and Bank deposits and others (27%) indicated their form of savings is Cash.





5.5: Participation and the effect of COVID 19 on PWDs

We endeavoured to capture what makes it easier or difficult for PWDs to fully participate in various activities within their communities. On the side of what makes it easier for OPDs to participate in their communities, 67% of respondents indicated they participate only when they are included in decision-making processes, 10% indicated for them to participate in community activities, they need assistive devices (crutches, wheelchairs, white canes, voice recorders, Sign Language Interpretation, prosthesis etc.), 15% indicated society must change attitudes and misperceptions about disability generally, 8% indicated a change of policies and laws will enable them to fully participate in community activities.

On the contrary of what makes it difficult for PWDs to participate in community activities, respondents revealed that public attitudes (60%), discrimination (15%), lack of family and wider society support (10%), absence of assistive devices (15%) are some of

the key elements that bar them from participating as indicated by respondents. The Focus groups also highlighted disability un-friendly policies and laws coupled with the accessibility of public infrastructures can limit the participation of PWDs in community activities.

When looking at the effect of COVID 19 on people living with disabilities, 45% of respondents indicated that the pandemic affects their disability and that of their households and places immense financial burden (15%) on them very much. Others indicated that their families struggle a lot (20%) whilst their income-earning opportunities were almost obliterated (20%) with their families needing help during the pandemic.



ICOM Manager discussing with a participant on the means of information during Covid-19



6.0: Recommendations

The principal livelihoods OPDs are found to be engaged in are Agriculture, Skills training and development and entrepreneurship (petty trading). There is, therefore, a need to support OPDs who show immense interest and dedication to subsistent farming and should be supported during the planting season.

For those involved in skills training and development and petty trading, the Commission and other stakeholders should ensure OPDs are supported with the necessary tools, financial resources and training needed to embark on sustainable production and marketing.

The Commission should engage financial service institutions to support the activities of OPDs who meet the requirement for loans and other bank grants across the country.

We also see the need to continue public education via print, electronics and social media on the rights of PWDs and their inclusion in governance and development activities.

The Commission and other stakeholders should lobby political parties and local governance institutions to include PWDs in all facets of society especially in the decision-making process across the board.

For those who share information generally for public consumption, we encourage all and sundry to ensure the information shared is disability-friendly by the use of Sign Language, pictures and braille.

The Commission is to encourage PWDs in OPDs to save funds they generate

whilst the Commission will engage financial service providers to consider PWDs as individuals and as groups in OPDs for financial services to support their livelihood activities.

The Commission will continue to encourage PWDs/OPDs to register and open accounts with banks within their communities. We further found the continuous need for assistive devices (prosthesis, white canes, braille, crutches, wheelchairs etc.) to aid PWDs in OPDs.

The Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Finance should increase budget allocation to the Commission for increased support of the livelihood activities of persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone



ICOM Manager discussing with stakeholders on the impact of covid-19 in the southern Regional Region





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