

Disability Awareness for Change:

The existent widespread trend of stigma meted upon persons with disability, more so physical disabilities, has been a factor that has cumulatively caused poor indicators in sexual and reproductive health and rights for the minority group. The vice has propelled exclusion in health policies especially in lower income and developing countries (LIDCs). A large percentage of this type of stigma has been attributed to beliefs in various cultures, which, sometimes, stem from superstition, taboos and retrogressive practices. Most of these cultural barriers are old, and have no place in current society, but still affect PWDs in the community as people obstinately hand on to them, despite constitutional and global human rights mitigations.

In contemporary African societies, PWDs were generally hidden from the public eyes, and parents of affected children were treated differently. The PWDs were considered unable to carry themselves out appropriately, and positions of leadership were never considered for them. In worst case scenarios, babies born with observable physical disability were killed at birth, though to be perceivers of evil spirits. Others were abandoned in forests, later on consumed by wild animals, and some cultures considered this as a community-cleansing offering. Franzen Bjorn (1990) observed that in some communities in Kenya, "a child with a disability is a symbol of a curse befalling the whole family. Such a child is a "shame" to the whole family, hence their rejection by the family or the community. Children who are met by those beliefs and attitudes can hardly develop to their full potential: "They get less attention, less stimulation, less education, less medical care, less upbringing and sometimes less nourishment than other children." However, society today has developed provisions that bridge the stigma and acceptance of PWDs, with regards to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, where *all people are born equal and free in rights and in dignity.*

The Dance into Space Foundation is uniquely working towards creating awareness on acceptance of PWDs, using mixed ability dancers, and is fashioned to foster the appreciation, practice and training in performing arts especially dance and theatre for entertainment, education and in community development. Through the exploration of traditional vocabularies and other elements of folk media, Dance into Space has developed a unique contemporary dance theatre language for performance and for awareness & advocacy. With a vision phrased in providing dance to all, the opportunities provided to PWDs and public performances of choreographed pieces alongside persons without disability are geared towards enabling community to accept the different abilities of PWDs, the collective roles they play in awareness for SRHR outcomes, and to provide economic empowerment in order to Break Barriers of cultural hindrances that stifle the overall well-being of PWDs. At the end of it all, clarification of values and attitude transformations will have a voice in community, to demystify myths, and to show that being with disability is not, necessarily, being disabled.