

Participation of persons with intellectual disabilities in self-employment: experiences from a low-income country

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Work and employment are instrumental to the realization of other rights, and the social inclusion of persons with disabilities. The livelihood of persons with disabilities is compromised when they lack access to social services and economic opportunities. Like all other citizens, persons with disabilities everywhere want to work, and can work, but they face discrimination in employment and are more likely to be unemployed or under employed than persons without disabilities. Individuals with intellectual disabilities are even more vulnerable to unemployment as they tend to lack formal educational qualifications and employable skills sets. In Uganda as well as other low-income countries, many persons with disabilities experience a high rate of multi-dimensional poverty. In countries where governmentally funded social safety net schemes are lacking and/or inadequate, work and employment are crucial for the livelihoods of citizens with disabilities. There is a growing recognition of self-employment as a viable means for increasing the labour force participation of persons with disabilities. Nearly a decade ago, Uganda established the *special grant* as a self-employment initiative that provides start-up capital to persons with disabilities who are organized in small groups, to start and manage their own income generating activities. Little is known about the inclusiveness of the special grant for the different types of disabilities, and how beneficiaries with intellectual disabilities are in particular accessing and utilizing the special grant. This paper examines self-employment initiatives for persons with disabilities in low income countries, drawing on the findings from a qualitative national level study that assessed the special grant initiative in Uganda. It further explores barriers and facilitators, and innovative practices for reinvigorating access to informal employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities relative to other persons with disabilities. The insights and lessons drawn from this paper will shape the enforcement of the special grant in Uganda, as well as other self-employment initiatives in low-income countries.