

Building relationships and getting governments to pay more attention

When the National Union of Disabled Persons of Uganda (NUDIPU) began monitoring two roads funded by the Bank and the AfDB, the Ugandan government did not include the organization in the development process. It did not appreciate the unique and vital input NUDIPU could offer on behalf of the 12.7% of Uganda's population who have disabilities. The government representatives were even skeptical that there was a significant number of people with disabilities in the country. At first, the relationship between NUDIPU and the Road Authority and Ministry of Works and Transport was adversarial. BIC's involvement helped transform that relationship and support NUDIPU so that the concerns of people with disabilities were taken seriously and their needs included.

There were three important functions BIC served to accomplish this. First, BIC would identify the projects NUDIPU needs to be monitoring, since the government won't. Second, BIC provided an external pressure that compelled the government to pay attention out of fear BIC might report noncompliance with certain standards to donors or of other international consequences. Third, BIC provided technical support to NUDIPU for the advocacy work, helping troubleshoot issues and strategize new methods.

One of the issues NUDIPU attempted to advocate around was road design; in existing roadways, manholes and trenches are often left open to allow water to flow smoothly, but are so wide that people fall in, making the terrain particularly dangerous for people with disabilities. In a meeting with the WB, AfDB, and Roads Authority, the staff became very defensive and were not receptive to NUDIPU's input. When NUDIPU consulted with BIC afterward, BIC helped the organization strategize a different approach — mobilize the communities most affected and bring them to headquarters so officials would face them directly. BIC also helped provide funding to transport these people to the city so that they could speak on their own behalf. NUDIPU saw that once individuals shared their lived experience with the AfDB and government officials, the latter were more willing to meet with NUDIPU and its constituency, and began to appreciate the need to consult people with disabilities. Since then, the government has requested whenever it visits a district, that NUDIPU organize local communities so it can meet them. The government joined NUDIPU on a foot trip in May 2023.

Through mounting continual pressure, NUDIPU has seen significant changes. The government is including people with disabilities in the planning process of the road projects; it has begun reaching out to and bringing NUDIPU in; and it is including the concerns and making changes to projects based on input from NUDIPU and the community more generally.