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**Bridging the Gap stories: Khalida Eisa
Haron Abdallah, Senior Public Health
Inspector at Port Sudan Municipality**



I am a Sudanese woman from Red Sea state, Port Sudan. I am currently working as a Senior Public Health Inspector in Port Sudan Municipality and I am a single mother of a 6-year-old girl. I lost my hearing suddenly in 1989 without ever having had a hearing problem before. I went to several medical specialists in **Sudan**, Saudi Arabia and Egypt and was diagnosed with a cognitive vulnerability of the nervous sides. The only treatment they recommended was **hearing aids**. I tried all kinds of hearing aids but none of them worked. So, I convinced myself that I had to accept my new situation and started paying attention to reading other people's lips to understand them when they speak.

At the beginning of my **hearing loss**, I had difficulty communicating with my colleagues, family and friends, so I avoided contact with people and focused on academic achievements. I was in the first grade of Secondary School, in the middle of my teenage years, which is a very critical period in people's lives, and it affected me psychologically. My mother was very concerned about me and was a great support in those difficult times. At one point I thought about not going to university, but she insisted on helping me to move on. Thanks to the support of my family and my confidence in Allah I was able to finish my high school studies and get good marks in the pre-university exams, which allowed me to enter the Faculty of Public and Environmental Health at **Khartoum University**. So surprisingly, I was the first person in the whole family to go to University

and I am very grateful to my family for not letting me give up.

In the process of applying to University, I also had to face another barrier because the director of the medical exam required alongside the registration refused to complete the test because of my **disability** arguing that I could not hear. I did my best to persuade him by explaining that I passed secondary school with the same disability, without any help from anyone, so I didn't need any special support and could manage on my own in the same way at University. But he maintained that the Secondary stage was very easy compared to University. I kept pushing my arguments more and more and finally, he agreed to accept my admission on the condition that I sign a consent form stating that I would not inform anyone at university that I had a **hearing impairment** and would not ask for help and support from anyone, including the teachers, or complain about lack of understanding. So I wrote that consent and received the certificates as medical evidence that allowed me to enter University.

Honestly, it was a little difficult for me to study at university because I could not hear the professors or understand all that they said. What I did was to write from what I saw on the blackboard or from my closest classmate. After class, I went to the library to find out more information about the topics discussed and to write personal summaries. Despite all the difficulties, I graduated with honours in 1998 and began working as a Public Health officer for many years. Then I returned to university and managed to complete a master's degree in **Public Health** in 2007.

A difficult moment in my professional career was when, as a Public Health inspector, I applied for exclusion from fieldwork due to my health condition to do the office work as it is more comfortable, but unfortunately the application was rejected. I was treated as just another worker and had many difficulties in the workplace. Sometimes I had to ask people to raise their voices so that I could hear them properly and they responded badly, with rejection or shouting, to show their condemnation of my request, and many even argued that the only thing that happened to me was that I was trying to get the attention of others. So, I had to concentrate very much on what the speaker was saying and when **lip-reading** was not clear enough to me, I asked them to write. Finally, I managed to overcome all these difficulties by focusing my work with more quality.

Later, I was appointed to run a department and I accepted the challenge.



By this time all the staff knew about my hearing impairment and we managed to communicate among ourselves. For example, in meetings, we wrote down different views or ideas and collected comments, questions and answers also in writing.

But, unfortunately, not all **women with disabilities** are as lucky as me. Women with disabilities generally face enormous difficulties in integrating into society as most families cannot take care of their education. Some are hidden in their homes without being allowed to leave the house and are given the entire burden of the household. This affects their psychology as most of them just stay at home without having an education, a job or starting a family.

That is why I think it is necessary to have organisations that add value to global development through the protection and promotion of the **rights of persons with disabilities** in all policies and programmes, taking into account their full and effective **participation in society, equal opportunities**, the right to **education**, the **employment** both in government and the private sector, the response to the needs and rights of children and women with disabilities, and the promotion of studies on disability for the early detection of causes and remedies.

In this regard, I think it is very positive the work of projects like Bridging the Gap. Last October I had the opportunity to participate in a Bridging the Gap workshop on management and **leadership skills** that was very beneficial. I learned a lot about how to do a project, supervision, monitoring and evaluation, how to organise coordination, networking and partnership for the success of the project. Within the workshop, I met **deaf persons** from all the states of Sudan so it was a good opportunity to meet and share experiences with other people with similar experiences as mine. These kinds of workshops are very important for the improvement of the lives of women with disabilities as they help us to be effective and productive.

At this moment I am facing a cancer from which I hope to recover soon to complete my PhD studies and participate in a project for **deaf women** aimed at helping us meet our needs and satisfy our daily lives together with our families.

I wish that project succeeds and I also hope to see the real implementation of the international agreement on the rights of persons with disabilities in Sudan so that we can feel and enjoy the **civil rights** that have often been



hampered for the most vulnerable. I hope that the enjoyment of **human rights** will become a reality for all soon.



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