# **COVID-19 Recovery and Disability Rights -** Livelihoods

Moderator: Simon Brown, Global Technical Lead Economic Empowerment

Panellists:

* Douglas Opio, executive director, Federation of Ugandan Employers (FUE)
* Deborah Iyute, program officer, National Union of Disabled persons of Uganda (NUDIPU)
* Stefan Tromel, Senior Disability Specialist, International Labour Organisation (ILO).

**Douglas Opio** starts with a submission on how Uganda has managed the health pandemic and explains macro level economic impacts. The pandemic and the lock down measures have led to reduced growth of the economy, and full recovery is expected to take time. Vaccination has started but is at a coverage of less than 2% which needs to be increased for the economy to open again. Douglas mentions that COVID19 and the related economic crisis have been an awakening call for many employers; for the first time there was so much attention on matters of health and general labor matters. He also notes that the pandemic helped to raise awareness and commitment on disability inclusion from various stakeholders, for example from companies like Uganda Breweries Limited and Coca Cola. Some companies have used the lock down period to work on accessibility measures. Also, more entities have joined the Uganda Business and Disability Network and are making commitments on disability inclusion. Overall, Douglas mentions an attitude change towards appreciating the importance of employing persons with disability and the value that they bring to the world of work.

**Deborah Iyute** shares about the voice people with disabilities in the Uganda COVID-19 response and the recovery processes and what more needs to happen as we move forward. The National Union of persons with Disabilities in Uganda (NUDIPU) has advocated the government to ensure that persons with disabilities are consulted when planning and implementing COVID19 response measures and prioritize the needs of persons with disabilities. This includes sign language interpretation during media briefings and Presidential addresses on Covid 19, an inclusive food distribution program and representation on the National Task force on COVID 19. Deborah further mentions the need for financial compensation for self-employed persons with disabilities who have lost business due to the effects of lockdown; Government to provide financial support, including through tax credits or incentives, to employers of persons with disabilities to provide equipment required for teleworking. She also stresses the need to have disaggregated data on disability and COVID-19 to better understand the effects of the pandemic on persons with disabilities, as well as the need to come up with a comprehensive social protection framework that takes into account the needs of persons with disabilities especially those with multiple disabilities and their care givers.

**Stefan Tromel** stresses that the dramatic fall in economic activity has a very significant impact on employment of persons with disabilities. There is a need to look at the effectiveness and inclusiveness of social protection approaches and the importance of them to not only provide a safety net for people with disabilities who have been economically impacted, but also in terms of supporting people with disabilities to get back into productive work. What is happening in Uganda, is a good snapshot of the global impact. The ILO coordinates the Global Business and Disability Network, and there are also over more than 30 National Business and Disability Networks. Last year, national networks were established in Uganda and Kenya. COVID-19 had an immense impact, and it is good to see that the commitment to disability inclusion was kept was maintained even sometimes increased. COVID 19 has highlighted the relevance of diversity and disability inclusion issues and it is realized that companies need a more humane approach. However, we must realize that the largest part of persons with disabilities is working in the informal economy, where they do not have the luxury of being able to work from home but are dependent on getting out into the streets to generate an income, which does not come through a payroll.

Social protection has been used in many countries as an emergency measure to bring cash to those households that needed that cash; in many cases, it has benefited persons with disabilities. The pandemic emergency has brought back the discussion about the unique disability card as a precondition to have a targeted approach on households with persons with disabilities. We also learned that social protection continues to be badly designed in many countries. We need to use the present crisis to build back better, and this needs close involvement of the Organizations of Persons with Disabilities. The COVID 19 recovery planning also highlights again the importance of having statistics on the employment situations of persons with disabilities. Even for ILO, when planning for rapid assessments we do need to include questions about people disabilities.

As for the digital economy that is now exponentially growing, we need to make sure that people with disabilities have the competence and skills to be fully included in these developments and the opportunities it brings. Same for the importance of a green COVID19 response. With the move from a carbon intensive to a low carbon economy, jobs will be created, and we must act all together, to see that part of these new jobs will go to persons with disabilities. We need to increase our efforts at all levels. Stefan further mentions changes at the level of the UN system; there is now a UN disability inclusion strategy, and all UN agencies have to report to the UN on how they are including persons with disabilities. This is not enough, and more actors, like Trade Unions, need to be engaged to proactively put the issue of disability inclusion on the agenda. Uganda is a good example of reaching out to Trade Unions to bring the disability inclusion as a key element of the three partite response to the crisis.

In response to a question from the audience each speaker mentioned one priority change moving forward:

Douglas, Federation of Uganda Employers: Integration of Disability Inclusion within the Uganda National Employment Planning Framework and stop seeing it as a side issue. Companies seeing a person with disabilities as integral to their organization.

Deborah, NUDIPU: the Uganda National Development Plan to recognize disability as a cross cutting issue in all sectors and allocation of budget to implement targeted activities.

Stephan, ILO: full inclusion of disability in all initiatives. Not only in the private sector, but also fully include persons with disabilities in the different mainstream initiatives that look at creating employment in rural economies. This will require for OPDs to be sitting at all these tables.