Promoting inclusive education with UNICEF in Kenya

One of the avenues to eradicate poverty is through the provision of education to the most vulnerable. This is what inspired Nahashon Njuguna to take up an assignment as national UN Volunteer Social Protection Officer with the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in Kenya.

With a Bachelor of Education in Special Needs Education from Moi University in Kenya, Nahashon provides technical support to the School Transport System for Children with Disabilities (STRIDE).

STRIDE is a project of the county government of Mombasa, under the Department of Education and ICT, and implemented with the technical support of UNICEF.

STRIDE aims to improve access and quality education for children with disabilities. It offers a school transport system for children with disabilities; an unconditional cash transfer to provide financial support to households with children with disabilities for school-related expenses; and the advocacy to increase the education, assessment and resource centres in the county. This is part of core social protection programmes to reduce the vulnerabilities of the targeted population.

"I am a person with a visual impairment (low vision). I understand the vulnerability of persons with disabilities. I also understand the stigma and discrimination that comes with it. Through my"
volunteer service, girls and boys have access to free, equitable and quality basic education, and get the support they need. --Nahashon Njuguna, national UN Volunteer Social Protection Officer with UNICEF in Kenya

The STRIDE programme led by Nahashon provides school transport for Tom Mboya School for Cerebral Palsy. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started, the programme has given financial support for school-related expenses to parents and guardians to ensure that children with disabilities attend school regularly.

So far, the programme has registered about 3,061 people with severe disabilities in five counties including Lamu, Mombasa, Kwale, Taita Taveta, and Kilifi. Some 3,164 children with disabilities have benefitted from cash transfer. Furthermore, 600 people in the community were sensitized, including parents, teachers, students, community and religious leaders, and Wazee wa Mtaa, or local leaders.

Nahashon’s UN Volunteer assignment is fully funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida). Through his volunteer assignment, he advocates for education for all. He hopes to see an increase in the capacity of the education, assessment and resource centres. These centres assess and assist children with disabilities to get proper placement in the correct educational institutions.

Volunteering has enabled me to use my expertise in special needs education, and to work in an area that I am passionate about - inclusive education at school and community level. -- Nahashon Njuguna

Nahashon connects children with disabilities to services and platforms in their community that are readily available from the government and other stakeholders. This includes getting the financial help to buy assisted devices to aid in daily challenges and offering scholarships to advance the education
Mombasa County is the first in Kenya to compile comprehensive data about children with disabilities. The data is a multi-sectoral collaboration of the programmes with partners. It highlights a number of key issues - the severity of disability status at schools, provision of disability cards, caregivers and household status. The data also determines resource allocation to best support everyone, everywhere.

The main objective of this programme is to identify barriers to the participation of people with disabilities, and to try to eliminate these barriers through awareness. In addition to this, the objective also includes increasing the enrolment and accessibility of schools that cater to persons with disabilities, and their special needs.

More support is needed for better counseling programmes for parents, caregivers, and teachers; more physical activity and improved nutrition for these children; and the promotion of an overall healthy and balanced life.

Nahashon fosters relationships with county staff, national stakeholders in the government and in the civil society, teachers and students. His hope is to create enough avenues through policy, recruitment, planning and budgetary considerations, where quality education is accessible to all.

"It is heartwarming to see the patience and dedication of teachers with children with disabilities, and watch the children learn and grow every day. -- Nahashon Njuguna"
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Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 4: Quality education SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals