

## Disability Africa - Visitors Policy

The first priority of Disability Africa is the welfare of the young people that participate in its programmes and the development of knowledgeable, skilled and self-reliant local people. It is recognised that Disability Africa's projects will be of genuine interest to many people in the United Kingdom and other countries and many will have an interest in 'visiting'. Whilst Disability Africa is encouraged by the increasing numbers of well-intentioned individuals wishing to engage with our work in Africa, we recognise the need to safeguard projects from the unintended negative effects which may result from the frequent and enthusiastic involvement of casual visitors.

### Poverty Tourism

It is not unnatural that those who want to help, also want to see the people that they are helping. Donors feel reassured that their resources are being well-used and the experience *for the visitor* is undoubtedly a positive one. Unfortunately, if allowed, the result of this logic would be that programmes for disabled young people would be turned in to 'zoos', in which anyone who has helped, or who is thinking of helping, would be able to visit Disability Africa projects in return for, or in advance of, their support. Many charitable projects have adopted this model, resulting in the development of an unhealthy and counterproductive 'poverty tourism'.

*The very notion of charity traditionally creates people as objects of pity and delivers services within a flawed framework where the donor is powerful, informed and generous and the 'beneficiary' is weak, ignorant, impoverished and grateful.*

Disabled people all over the world, and particularly in the communities in Africa where Disability Africa works, suffer from stigma; their rights are unrecognised and they are excluded. When they are 'included' it is often as such 'objects of curiosity' or pity. The exclusion of disabled people begins in the minds of the non-disabled. Stigma and negative belief are the major barriers to the creation of inclusive communities. Actions that are consistent with this traditional view of charity only serve to reinforce exclusion.

Disability Africa believes that an approach based on partnership, empowerment and consultation is the only way to build communities in which inclusion of disabled people becomes the norm. This approach is unfortunately incompatible with frequent one-off visits by interested people. Such 'poverty tourism' is counterproductive as it encourages notions of dependency, weakness and patronage.

The aim of Disability Africa is to work towards a situation where disabled people are included as valid, viable members of their communities. Allowing visits from donors or would-be supporters serves to further isolate an already seriously disenfranchised and unappreciated group and works counter to the ideals of inclusion which form the very basis of Disability Africa's mission.

### Child Protection and Parental Consent

Disability Africa takes issues of safeguarding and child protection very seriously. We will never undertake any actions which may potentially compromise the welfare of the children who participate in our projects. ***Please refer to our Child Protection Policy for more details.***

It would be highly unusual for a project working with disabled children and young people in the UK to liberally grant visiting access to all of its supporters and prospective supporters. Disability Africa sees no reason why projects in Africa should be any different. The wishes and views of parents, even when not directly expressed, must be prioritised and respected. A family's decision to engage with the project and allow their children to benefit from the services that Disability Africa provides does equate to the granting of permission for interested foreigners to visit, interact with or take pictures of their children.

Also, as a foreign organisation intervening in the affairs of a community that is not our own and promoting ideas which challenge traditional thinking about impairment, Disability Africa must be mindful of how its projects are perceived locally. It is only natural that certain community members may be suspicious of the true motives of our projects. The presence of regular foreign visitors will only increase such suspicions and therefore must be avoided to maximise the extent to which projects are fully accepted by the communities that they are aiming to serve.

**Visits are made to Disability Africa projects by invitation only.**

**We ask that supporters send any requests to the Director ([director@disability-africa.org](mailto:director@disability-africa.org)).**

**We hope supporters will understand that the vast majority of requests will, regretfully, be declined.**

**For information on the ways in which you can meaningfully help Disability Africa please visit:**

**<http://www.disability-africa.org/take-action/>**